Sports Heroes

Young athletes with physical disabilities still know how to play the game

In Damn the Disabilities: Full Speed Ahead, Jack Cavanaugh gives readers 15 chapters of expertly crafted human-interest stories detailing the lives of individuals who overcame severe handicaps to excel in amateur sports.

Throughout the book, the author brings to life stories of survival, struggle, and success from the points of view of athletes, family members, coaches, and friends. In so doing, Cavanaugh creates a forum for family members to discuss their personal tragedies and journeys to recovery while providing individuals with disabilities an opportunity to re-examine their remarkable achievements.

The first two chapters, for example, give accounts of teenagers with disabilities who participated in basketball.

Chris Samele, a high school basketball star who lost a leg in a car accident, never doubted for a moment that he would compete again on the court, and bravely coped with the severe pain caused by the prosthetic device he used when he played.

How was he able to marshal the inner strength to carry on? "Ever since I was small I've always been positive about things," he says. "I've never let myself get down. I believe in God and have a lot of faith in him, but that's not the only reason. It's my upbringing, too; the way my parents brought me up."

Samele also seemed to understand from the start that his achievements would one day inspire others to do the same. "I guess I've tried to prove that you can still be successful in sports, or in anything else, with a handicap if you work hard enough at it," he says.

Jeni Armbruster became blind at the age of 13 as a result of an inflammation of the optic nerve. For many young people, such a disability might have meant years of overwhelming sorrow and self-pity. Yet Armbruster was determined to follow as fulfilling a life as possible, playing basketball throughout high school and, at the age of 17, becoming one of the youngest athletes ever to compete in the 1992 Paralympic Games in Barcelona, Spain.

"If God had meant for this to happen to me, I guess he did because he knew I could handle it, and I know I can," says Armbruster. "I've accepted it, although I'd give anything to have my sight back. And maybe someday that will happen. In the meantime it's strange but I've seen things I'd never seen before, and heard stories and met people I wouldn't have if this hadn't happened. It's all opened my eyes in a different sort of way."

The faith, courage, hard work, persistence, and desire to overcome obstacles displayed by Samele and Armbruster are just as evident in the lives of the other athletes portrayed in this book. Each narrative draws attention to a person who dared to excel beyond adversity and paints a picture of heroes determined to compete with the best and succeed at the game.

These stories, taken collectively, speak of the triumph of the human spirit and convey Cavanaugh's belief that individuals with disabilities deserve to be recognized and celebrated for their hard-won accomplishments. Cavanaugh, too, deserves high praise for the inspiration his narratives provide to us all.

— Bobbie Perdue
Other Alumni Books

Color Lines: The Troubled Dreams of Racial Harmony In An American Town
By Mike Kelly '75
592 pp. Morrow. $25
From teenage gangs and charges of police harassment to multicultural schooling and race riots, Color Lines is a dramatic, illuminating look at how a diverse middle-class town was shattered on a rainy night in 1990 when police responded to a call about a teenager with a gun. Author Mike Kelly examines the way race plays on people's personal lives in a typical American town and shows how the dilemmas of race still exert a powerful hold on American life.

Earth First!
Environmental Apocalypse
By Martha F. Lee G'94
224 pp. Syracuse University Press. $16.95
Martha Lee explores Earth First!, a "radical underground environmental movement" whose goal is to help achieve the fall of industrial civilization. The movement's apocalyptic doctrine, beliefs, and strategies are expressed in spectacular, dangerous, and sometimes illegal activities, and illustrate the inherent dangers associated with such movements.

Fight Fat
By Stephen C. George '89 et al.
176 pp. Rodale Press. $14.95
This addition to the Men's Health Life Improvement Series offers a total lifestyle program for men to stay slim and healthy. Fight Fat focuses on strategies for men to trim fat out of their lives—and burn it off their frames. It offers practical eating tips, exercise routines, and a series of interviews with men from many walks of life who discuss their proven fat-fighting strategies.

Talking With Your Baby: Family as the First School
By Alice Sterling Honig G'75
and Holly Elizabeth Brophy G'92
150 pp. Syracuse University Press. $9.95
Talking With Your Baby examines an area in child development rarely addressed: how to help low literacy parents and parents for whom English is a second language enhance language and development of their children at home and through daily routines. Writing for that audience, authors Honig and Brophy recommend emphasizing early talking and word power, early language ability, and reading skills with babies and preschoolers.

Trading Post Guidebook
By Susan Makow '74 and Patrick Eddington
224 pp. Northland Publishing. $17.95
This guidebook features addresses, telephone numbers, directions, interviews, and descriptions of some 500 trading posts, galleries, museums, artists, and other arts and crafts outlets throughout the Navajo, Hopi, Ute, Paiute, and Apache reservations; the Rio Grande Pueblos; and major Southwest border towns and cities. Also included is information to assist readers in making educated, confident decisions about purchasing artwork.

Love and Dishes:
The Soap Opera Cookbook
By Irene Krawcz Keene '81
121 pp. Hearst Books. $16.95
This cookbook provides scene-stealing recipes from your favorite soap opera stars. The concoctions include everything from "Opening Acts" (salads, soups, and salasas) to "Cliffhanger" desserts. Photographs of the stars, brief biographies, and personal anecdotes make this book a must for every daytime television fan.

Perspectives on German Cinema
By Terri Ginsberg '85 and Kirsten Thompson
592 pp. G.K. Hall & Co. Scholarly Reference. $65
In Perspectives, the authors collected classic and newly commissioned essays and articles that address a wide range of historical issues, including the politics of gender and sexuality, the Holocaust, feminism, and Nazi propaganda films. Discussions of dramas and documentaries, filmmakers, and artistic ideologies cover all aspects of German cinema, from its silent beginnings to the present day.

Through the Spylglass
By Anne M. Hays G'94
160 pp. American Literary Press. $14.95
The what and why of sailing are the two essential elements Anne M. Hays addresses in this collection of essays and short stories. These tales are designed to make you think and laugh, be glad you already sail, or encourage you to do so. All the writings are based on Hays' 30 years of experience day sailing, live-aboard cruising, and racing sailboats.

Power, Pasta and Politics:
The World According to Senator Al D'Amato
By Alfonse D'Amato '59, G'61
357 pp. Hyperion. $24.95
In Power, Pasta and Politics, New York Senator Alfonse D'Amato delivers his own "State of the Union." He tells the story of his struggle as the grandson of immigrants who beat the odds. He chronicles his fight to bring change to an out-of-touch upper-class Congress. He sees the need to transform an ideologically charged Republican Party, now in danger of losing its solid base of support with the middle class, into a party of personal freedom and responsibility. And D'Amato champions the struggle to galvanize a new coalition of voters for the next generation.

Janice Day of Arizona is one of many trading post operators featured in the Trading Post Guidebook.  

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