

Houdeshell wins historic wheelchair race

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 29 October 2011 20:59 - Last Updated Saturday, 29 October 2011 21:56



FORT DODGE - Jordan Houdeshell enjoys blazing new trails for himself and other people with physical disabilities.

He did it again Saturday in historic fashion.

Houdeshell won the first wheelchair cross country title in state history with an inspirational performance that drew the loudest ovations of the day at Lakeside Municipal Golf Course.

State officials think it also was the first wheelchair state cross country race in the country.

"I think it's awesome," said Houdeshell, a junior at Linn-Mar High School. "This may sound kind of dumb, but I wish I wasn't the first, because I wish there were more people doing it."

Houdeshell was born with spina bifida and cannot walk or run, yet trains regularly with the Linn-Mar cross country team and routinely practices 30 to 45 miles a week in his wheelchair. He once went 40 miles in one day and would like to try a marathon.

He also plays wheelchair basketball, participates in wheelchair track and field, and does other strenuous activities.

"He's got great heart to him," Linn-Mar cross country coach Todd Goodell said. "He doesn't let little things bother him."

Houdeshell wins historic wheelchair race

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 29 October 2011 20:59 - Last Updated Saturday, 29 October 2011 21:56

"There was an article in our school newspaper about him. One of the questions was, 'Is being in a wheelchair a hindrance or is it going to be helpful at times?', and he said it's just the way it is.

"He just deals with it and takes advantage of his opportunities and doesn't feel sorry for himself," Goodell said. "He's got things to accomplish and he's got great spirit."

There were only two wheelchair athletes in the state meet. Houdeshell defeated Drake Sachsenmeier of Camanche by a considerable margin, then waited at the finish line to congratulate his companion for a job well done.

Houdeshell knew he'd be competing for the first wheelchair title in state history, but was surprised to hear the announcer say it also was probably the first state-level wheelchair cross country race in the nation. "I wasn't sure if it was true," he said.

Houdeshell braced himself at the starting line at 11:30 Saturday morning for the race of his life.

"I had butterflies in my stomach. It was crazy," he said. "I've never been that nervous in my life."

He quickly grabbed the lead and raced around the course. As he wheeled himself down the stretch, he received a rousing ovation from a row of fans that stretched 150 yards on either side of the course.

He finished in 17 minutes, 2 seconds, which chopped about 3 minutes off his personal best.

"It was great," he said. "It was an adrenaline rush all the way. I was shaking so bad. My adrenaline was pumping so hard."

Houdeshell wins historic wheelchair race

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 29 October 2011 20:59 - Last Updated Saturday, 29 October 2011 21:56

Houdeshell has a wheelchair that he uses on a regular basis during the day, but has a special chair for racing.

"It cost around \$6,000 when we bought it," he said, "but we got a good deal on it so we paid half that."

Houdeshell has simple advice for other people with disabilities who might be thinking about a physical activity.

"Just try it," he said. "If you don't like it, you don't have to do it. Go out and try something new."

He loves competing.

"Everything I do is just a big confidence booster for myself," he said. "I really don't let anybody get me down or anything."

"There's name calling and stuff like that, but I just look the other way. It's not worth getting upset about it."