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“Combat Challenge”



A firefighter is accustomed to racing against time and obstructions. Norfolk firefighters and paramedics Lance Conroy, Ryan Goodman and Chad Wurdeman not only strive to be fast and strong when their job calls for it but they pit themselves in Combat Challenges against other firefighters that measure their strength, speed and agility.

“This is our third year together. We’re a pretty new team. We know that even at regional competition, we’ll compete against some of the best,”

Conroy said recently from Norfolk’s Fire Station 2 where the team members will occasionally work out.

Though new, the team has qualified at regional competitions in Colorado Springs and Omaha. They competed in a national competition Las Vegas last year and finished 54th out of 150 teams. It’s definitely not a competition for the weak kneed.

The contest consists of five different events and requires that the firefighters wear their entire bunker gear while competing. They must also wear an air pack which replicates conditions in a fire situation. In all they will be carrying an extra 50-60 pounds of weight with them.

“You have to get used to wearing the face piece and breathing air out of a bottle,” Conroy said.

Two firefighters with matching times compete against each other. In the first event, they each have to take a 45 pound fire hose wrapped up tight (known as a high rise pack) and haul it up five stories of stairs to deposit in a box.

In the second event, they have to hoist up a fire hose the entire five stories. Next they run down the five flights of stairs and swing a sledge hammer to move a 165 pound sled five feet on an I beam.

The next event is a 150 foot run around a fire hydrant obstacle course.

Then the contestants will carry a water filled hose 75 feet and spray it on a target. In the last event, the firefighter has to drag a 175 pound dummy 106 feet.

The time taken to do all of this? Lance’s best time is two minutes. The world record is a minute and 25 seconds.

The Norfolk competitors also participate in a relay team on the same course but they hand off a baton as they finish their part of the competition.

"We've only got three on our team but we usually go against five member teams. This is usually held the second day of the competition," Conroy said.

Training is intense for firefighters anyway but these three have to go the extra mile to compete against firefighters across the nation. Besides lifting weights and running, they also do cross fit training. Goodman is a certified trainer who puts the group through different sets of exercises meant to maximize their agility and speed.

"We go to the fire training tower two to three times a week to run stairs and do dummy drags. We may run up and down the tower twenty times (which is equal to about 100 flights of stairs)," Conroy said.

Their next competition is the weekend of July 19-20 in Rapid City. They are also looking at competing in Omaha over Labor Day weekend which would allow them to qualify for the World Competition in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in November.

In past competitions they use their own money for entry fees, lodging, gas and any travel expenses. At one competition they stayed at a firefighter's home. The City of Norfolk paid their entry fees at one competition but they take vacation time off from their jobs to compete.

"We're always looking for sponsors. It gets to be a little expensive but we enjoy it."

Conroy said they also couldn't compete without the help of another team member- his wife, Rachel. She videos the team, registers them in the competitions, sets up their travel and lodging and is in charge of their items during the competition.

"All of these skills and training translates into our job- the need to swing a sledge hammer to vent a roof, the need to be able to pull a person out of a burning building. You need to be able to run up nine stories and still have the energy to fight a fire," Conroy said.