

WHEELS! 'Chance to Excel'

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her now job at Kodak, she had only enough vacation time for one regional event. So, loaded with determination, she qualified in five divisions in a single meet.

Each member of Rochester Wheels is placed in a category for competition according to his disability, which must be a permanent one. Although many can use crutches, everyone must compete in a wheelchair.

Julius Duval broke his spine when he fell off a scaffolding. He is confined to a wheelchair and his massive shoulders are evidence of the hundreds of hours spent in training. He holds national and world records for track and field events and has been honored several times as the United States' top athlete. For example, he can whip through a 40 yard dash in 11 seconds and the 60 meter in 18 seconds.

"If the pressure is on, I work to break a record," Duval said. He is spending his sabbatical leave from Xerox at the Rochester Rehabilitation Center where he is involved in counseling, driver education, evaluation and recreation for the handicapped.

Rochester Wheels began in 1965 at Jefferson High School, where Roger Bunce, gym teacher, set up physical education classes for the handicapped.

Miss Keyser became part of the group because "I've always been interested in athletics and it gives everyone a chance to excel." Competition is held in fencing, track and field, swimming, slalom

and the hurdles. For the latter, racers must jump their wheelchairs over nine hurdles, which are two-by-four pieces of lumber set ten feet apart. The oldest member of the Rochester group is 54 and holds the world record for precision javelin throwing.

"In a wheelchair it's easy to become inactive. Your circulation is often poor and the activities keep the body going," said Kathy Melnick, a member for nine years. At the New England regional competition, Miss Melnick was named the best female athlete and received the sportsmanship award.

Miss Melnick, Miss Keyser and a third team member, Connie Head, can boast of being on the fastest relay team in the world. They set a record at world games in England last year.

A major problem facing members of Rochester Wheels is that "people don't take us seriously enough," Miss Keyser said.

"Many people have a narrowminded attitude and don't

understand what we're all about," Miss Melnick added.

The philosophy of the group is that they are healthy people who happen to have a handicap. They view their group as an outlet and they "party a lot together." Two members of Rochester Wheels were married recently.

"The attitude of the kids is really good. If you have a bad attitude the kids will hassle you until you shake loose," Duval grinned.

Training for the wheelchair Olympics is stringent. Wheelchairs are made to the specifications of each athlete. No seat belts are allowed. "If you fall out and can get back in, you can keep going," Miss Keyser said.

Competing in the world games, held every four years in areas where the regular Olympics are held, has taken the athletes far afield. In 1968 they traveled to Israel and took side trips to Athens and Rome. Duval recalled his awe when he was introduced to Pope Paul VI. "I couldn't think of anything to say," he said sheepishly.

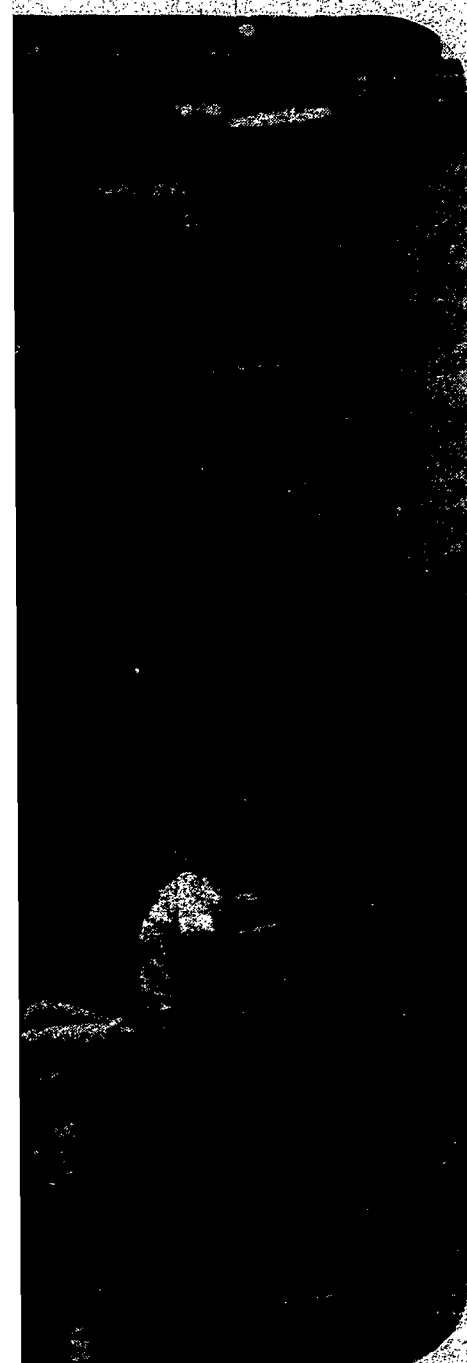


Members of the Rochester Wheels wait for last minute arrangements before wheeling through the obstacle course. From left to right are Jo Ann Keyser, Kathy Melnick, Kathy Bus, Lenny Strom, and Bill Dingwell.



Bobby James, a counselor and assistant varsity basketball coach at Brockport College, wheels into trouble during his try at the obstacle course. Gene Spinning, manager-coach of the Rochester Wheels and father of one of the members, gives the teetering James a push.

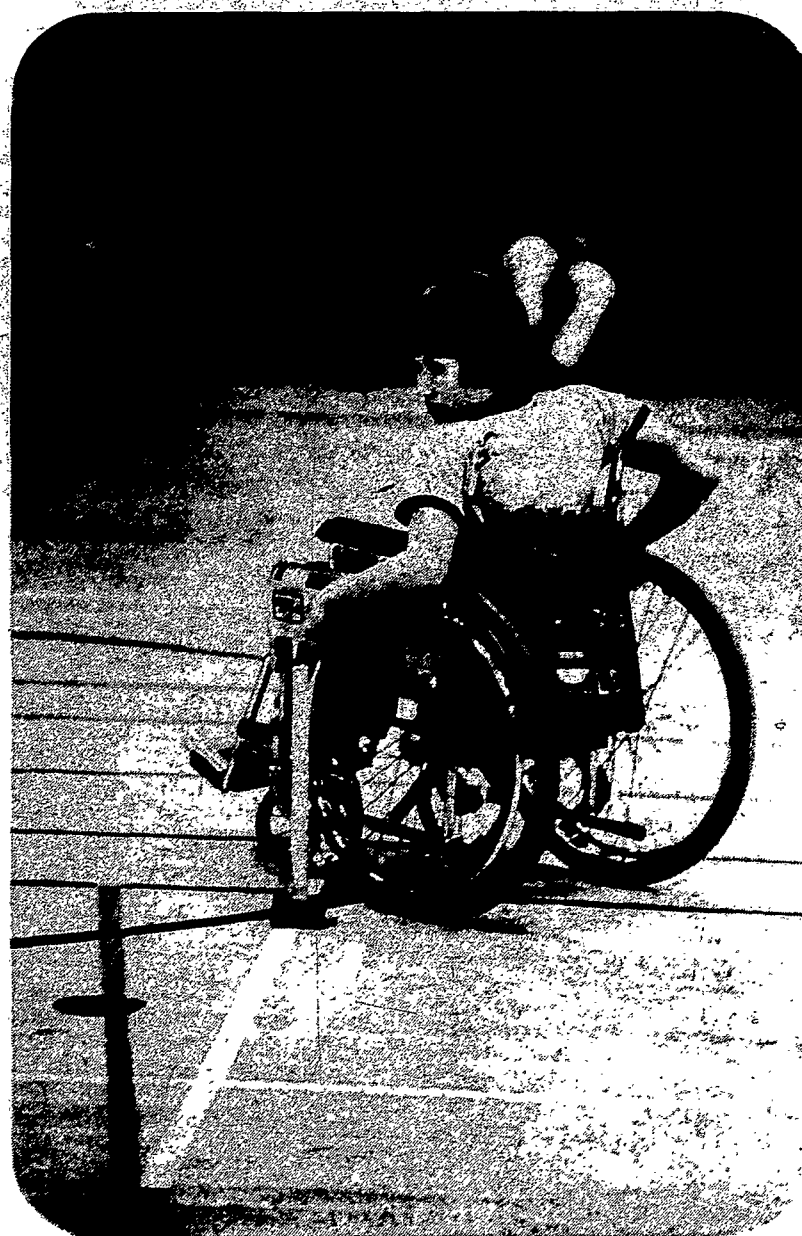
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PHOTOS BY SUSAN MCKINNEY



Jo Ann Keyser takes aim at the basket.



Lenny Strom passes to Jo Ann Keyser as they move the ball down court.



Jo Ann Keyser lays out an obstacle course for members of the audience to try.