

# Firefighters contend for bragging rights

Maine firefighters are among 100 who take part in grueling Combat Challenge events.

By **SETH HARKNESS**  
*Staff Writer*

A highly conditioned athlete in Spandex isn't everyone's first image of a firefighter, but there were dozens of them at the firefighters' gathering at the corner of the Maine Mall parking lot Saturday.

If you happened to be trapped in a burning building, the person you'd most like to see probably was among these contestants in

the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge.

About 100 firefighters from Texas, New Brunswick and places in between came to compete in a demanding series of maneuvers performed in boots and heavy firefighting gear. Contestants sprinted up four flights of stairs with a hose over their shoulders, hoisted a rope tied to a 48-pound weight hand-over-hand, dragged a 175-pound dummy, and more, in an event that often left them gasping at the finish line.

Maine firefighters from Portland, South Portland and several other departments took

part in the Combat Challenge, though few came close to matching the times posted by those who spend several hours a day in the gym specifically training for these contests.

"The people that are here are not your typical firefighters," said Jason Mills of the Augusta Fire Department, who took part in the team relay contest. "There's nobody walking around here with big Dunkin' Donuts coffees."

Most Maine firefighters said they had trained about six months for the event, which

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*Staff photo by Herb Swanson*

**A Bangor** firefighter competes in the hose pull of the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge in South Portland on Saturday.



Staff photo by Herb Swanson

**Two firefighters** compete in the tower climb portion of the competition at the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge Saturday in South Portland.

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came to Maine for the first time Saturday. Regional contests such as this one held around the country will lead to a world championship in Las Vegas in November and cash prizes of \$15,000.

Most Mainers were taking part for the first time, though Lt. Richard Urban of the South Portland Fire Department, in his second season of competition, qualified for the championship in Las Vegas, finishing the course in a time of 2 minutes, 25 seconds.

Urban, 46, said he was in the best physical shape he has been in for 20 years after preparing for the Combat Challenge by running wind sprints, lifting weights and hiring a personal trainer. Like most contestants, he said training for the challenge also made him a better firefighter.

"If I can do this here, there isn't a situation I'm going to get into on the fire ground I can't handle," he said.

Fifty-one-year-old John McGrattan of Fredericton, N.B., the Combat Challenge world champion for his age group, said he also saw the benefits of his training on the job.

"All you have to do is look behind you when you're climbing up a five-story building," he said.

McGrattan said his workout regimen involves two 90-minute sessions a day and lots of running up stairs at a parking garage. The contest, in which firefighters wear about 75 pounds of gear, is so grueling that many people lose as much as five pounds of body weight in one run, he said.

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