

Firefighters competing in challenge



Photos by Jenny Sevcik, Messenger-Inquirer/jsevcik@messenger-inquirer.com, 926-0123

At full force, Owensboro Firefighter Chris Luttrell pulls a fire hose toward a target Wednesday afternoon while practicing for this weekend's Nextel Firefighter Combat Chal-

lenge in Evansville. The Hose Advance is the fourth event in the five-part competition that a group of four local firefighters have been training for since April.

FIRED UP

By Joy Campbell
Messenger-Inquirer

They're calling it "the toughest two minutes in sports."

This weekend, a group of Owensboro firefighters will join about 200 more from the United States and Canada to compete in the Nextel Evansville Firefighter Combat Challenge. The fitness competition takes place Friday and Saturday in the parking lot across from Casino Aztar on Riverside Drive.

"What makes this neat is that the challenge is the same worldwide, and you can see where you stack up and compare yourself to everyone."

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The Owensboro firefighter relay team won this trophy, sporting an alligator head, for being named the Best New Team in the Southeastern United States Combat Challenge.

Firefighters: Owensboro squad won Best New Team in the Southeastern United States

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said Joey Dickens, who competes in the relay and team events.

The "challenge" is a five-station relay event with each firefighter on the team performing a specific task and handing off to a team member. All are dressed in full turnout gear that consists of coat, pants, boots, helmet, glasses and air pack — weighing 70 pounds.

The tasks are not easy. The first fireman carries about 42 pounds of fire hose up a five-story tower and hands off to another, who hoists about 45 pounds of hose from the ground. The next man uses a regulation ax to move 169 pounds of weight on a sled 5 feet. Step four is to run a short course and drag the hose back. At the last station, a fireman drags a 175-pound dummy 100 feet walking backward.

On Wednesday, the group practiced their "starts" at the local training site at 14th and Daviess streets.

The competition is a sport within a profession where everyone has a good time, said Byron McDonald, another

To Learn More

For more information about Friday and Saturday's Nextel Evansville Firefighter Combat Challenge, visit www.evansvillecvb.org/sporting-events.

firefighter on the team who also competes individually.

The other team members are Zack Ryer and Chris Luttrell.

Teams can have three to five members. The local team now has four, so Luttrell performs two of the five tasks. The assignments may change as the group continues to practice and compete.

Since they started training for the challenge events, the Owensboro team has entered two competitions. They qualified for the world challenge on their first time out of the gate in Manassas, Va., by finishing the relay in less than two minutes.

In the second event last month in Gainesville, Fla., they were named the Best New Team in the Southeastern United States.

"For a first-year team, we're

pleased with where we're at," Dickens said. "This takes a lot of commitment and a lot of travel."

The men practice two to three times per week, and on the off days they try to do some cardiovascular training.

The top teams in the world have been competing for five to six years, Ryer said.

In their rookie year, the firefighters have received support from the city, fire department and a long list of people, Ryer said.

"We want to work on getting a corporate sponsor for next year," Ryer said. "We're probably looking at entering five events next year, including the world championships."

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