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Volunteer firefighters overcome challenges



Tom Smith is still recovering from his injuries

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Story filed by NewsCenter16 Reporter
[Robert Borrelli](#)

[Topeka, IN](#) - Volunteer firefighters from the small town of Topeka are really proud of what they do. Earlier this month, a team from Topeka went to Las Vegas for the Firefighter Combat Challenge, a series of skill-driven challenges. Little did they know, their greatest challenge would come off the course.

It's a competition of the best of the world's firefighters. Ryan Kauffman, one of the volunteer firefighters, says, "Once you're out on that course you get in a different mode, you just wanna' get done as fast as you can and do the best that you can."

The day before the finals, the group had a challenge of their own. While sightseeing on motorcycles, Assistant Chief Tom Smith and his wife Sue were thrown from their bike.

"All I did was barely squeeze the front brake and the bike just went 'boom' over," remembers Tom.

With three broken ribs, a broken leg and contusions on his lung, Tom's injuries were severe.

"It was getting harder and harder to breathe, so it was real important they get me to the hospital," he says.

Tom's teammates helped Sue, a medical technician, tend to her injured husband as a helicopter flew him to a Las Vegas hospital.

Sue says, "It was nice having the support of them. They went and called the ambulance right away, it was great."

Tom says of his fellow volunteers, "They're a bunch of good guys. I tried to tell them earlier in the year they'd be faster without me but they wanted me to stay on the team."

At the competition, the team was one man short.

"We decided we were going to run the next day for tom and do the best we can. Even though he was going to be in the hospital, we gave it all we had," says Kauffman.

Tom says, "They came within 4-seconds of our best time, without me there. So, I'm very proud of their accomplishments."

The team is just as proud of Tom. Tom was brought home by air ambulance earlier this week. He'll stay in LaGrange Community Hospital several more days, with physical therapy after that.

Out of 96 teams the volunteers from Topeka placed 62nd. They were the only all-volunteer team to



The Topeka volunteer firefighters are (from l-r) Tom Smith, Ryan Kauffman, Adam Lambright, Nathan Hill and Chad Iddings

compete in the finals.

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