



# He Just Keeps Going!

Para athlete doesn't let his disability deter him from doing what he loves

BY DANETTE M. WATT

**Zachary Young's life forever changed** in a 2005 car crash. But his life took on new purpose in 2010, when a gift set him on a course to become an elite para athlete.

Young, a native of Jackson, had returned to his hometown in 2004 right after he graduated from Orlando Technical Institute. He says the job market dried up in Florida, and he planned to work as a welder after completing a program at Cape Career and Technology Center.

But his life went in a different direction on Oct. 15, 2005—what he called a beautiful fall morning. Young, then 22, fired up his motorcycle and headed to his part-time job at Texas Roadhouse in Cape Girardeau. About one-and-a-half miles from home, a vehicle made a sharp left turn in right front of him.

"I hit the mini-van head on," says Young, now 30. "It was like a domino effect on my spinal cord, which was severed at the T-7 level. I lay there, conscious, but I couldn't feel my legs."

An ambulance took Young to St. Francis Medical Center in Cape Girardeau, where he spent a week in the Intensive Care

Unit. Preliminary X-rays showed a 99.9% chance he wouldn't walk again. His doctors said he was paralyzed from the waist down.

"It was a shock for my family," Young says. "Just the day before, I was chipper and walking around. A lot of support came from my family and friends who came to see me the three weeks I was in the hospital."

## FEELING LIKE HIMSELF AGAIN

Young was moved to Missouri Rehab Center in Mt. Vernon, Ill., where he relearned tasks such as cooking, getting himself in and out of bed, and "just managing life," he says.

"I was amazed at how heavy my legs were when I lifted them to get in and out of my wheelchair," Young says.

The first several years were an adjustment period. Young became depressed, but his faith and wanting to continue his education helped keep his head high. He soon enrolled in a computer and multimedia graphics program at Southeast Missouri State University.

He says the beginning of his new journey let him reflect on what happened, and then learn how to take control of the situation.

"It was a period of self-introspection," Young says.

*I was amazed at how heavy my legs were when I lifted them to get in and out of my wheelchair.*

ZACHARY YOUNG





In March 2013, Zachary Young, *far left*, raced in the Howard Aslinger Foundation Endurance Run in Cape Girardeau. During the event, he completed 82 miles in 12 hours. Over Memorial Day weekend, Young, *above*, competed in the Capital of Texas Triathlon, in Austin, Texas. The triathlon is a USA Paratriathlon National Championship event, in which he finished sixth place. In September 2013, Young, *bottom left*, raced in the 2013 Coors Light/Trail of Tears Triathlon in Jackson.

## GETTING BACK IN THE RACE

Racing and sports were a big part of Young's life as a teenager. He loved bikes, and even competed in some motocross races at the national level. He thought his disability would keep him out of the races. But in 2010, cycling circled back into his life.

He says one day he went with his father to a local Veterans of Foreign Wars site, and when they arrived, a hand cycle was waiting for him. A friend of his dad—and fellow Korean War vet—gave the chair to Young as a gift.

"It was like riding a bike for the first time all over again," he says. "I loved the freedom, exercise, fun, enjoyment and rush. It was something I had been missing in my life for quite some time."

Young remembers the first time he took the hand cycle for a spin beyond his neighborhood, which meant conquering a steep hill.

"I felt a sense of freedom because of the wind in my face as I pedaled down the open road," he says. "I also felt the athletic accomplishment of making it up that hill after a month of working at it. It seemed the possibilities were endless."

In 2011, his dad bought him a new racing bike, and challenged him to enter a local triathlon. Since that first race, Young has competed in about 30 more, including 16 triathlons, a half-Ironman competition in 2013, and races ranging from 5Ks to marathons.

Young currently trains six days per week, coached by Doug Havlin, of Swim Bike Run in St. Louis. He plans to compete in several elite level races over the summer, wrapping up with the 2014 U.S. National Paratriathlon Championships in Tempe, Ariz., in September.

His ultimate goal is to qualify and represent the United States in the paratriathlon at the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro.

"You never know what your capable of unless you get out there and try," he says. "My family is behind me 100%. They keep me going."

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