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**BACK
IN THE
RACE**

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WARRIORS FIGHT TO RIDE



Back In The Race

by Tammy Lechner

As Lois Taurman rolls her racing chair along the streets near her southern Louisville home, neighbors wave friendly hellos from their yards. Taurman returns the greetings with a generous smile and a fun quip to most.

Neighbors remember this 26-year-old athlete when she *ran* through the

streets to keep herself conditioned for sports during her high school and college career.

Her honors at Louisville's Bellarmine College include the women's basketball career scoring record (1,414 points)—and the distinction of being the only athlete ever to letter in three



Lois's mother took leave of absence from her job to devote full attention toward getting her to the Olympics.



sports (basketball, volleyball and softball) during each of her four years (1979-83).

The community applauded outstanding athletic accomplishments. None of this has changed.

In spite of a near-fatal falling accident in 1984 that left Taurman quadriplegic, the athletic desire in her has remained undaunted. Today she is on the path of becoming the best female wheelchair racer in her class in the world, after only two years of involvement with the sport.

"It's Lois's attitude that impresses people so much today," says her mother, Bonna Taurman. "The wheelchair hasn't changed her enthusiasm toward anything, really. She's always

been a competitor...and a winner."

Evidence of Taurman's winning ways adorn the walls and shelves of her bedroom—numerous trophies, certificates, medals, plaques. But among the many symbols of achievement in the room there rests one special decoration that means more to her than any other.

It is a quotation set in embroidered yarn that states, "When God closes a door he opens a window."

"That's Lois's philosophy exactly," says her mother. "And it's so ironic that she has had that saying hanging on her bedroom wall long before the accident."

It is that very attitude that has Taurman today capturing yet more accolades. In her most recent competition,

the Stokes-Mandeville Games held in England during early August, four gold medals and three silvers garnished Taurman's shoulders. The Stokes-Mandeville Games is a pre-Olympic warm-up for select international athletes.

And in this year's 30th National Wheelchair Games held during June in Houston, Tex., Taurman earned six gold medals in Class IA competition, which is the category for athletes with the severest level of disability.

This was nearly a repeat performance from the same competition held September '86 in Champaign, Ill. when Taurman brought home nine gold medals and set four national records. She was recognized as the season's Most Outstanding Novice Female.

This showing earned her a place on the Development Team, a group of elite wheelchair athletes who are now being groomed for the 1988 Paralympic Games in Seoul, South Korea. The international games will be held two weeks after the Olympics.

"Able-bodied or disabled, I've always loved the outdoors and I'll do anything to be productive outside," says Taurman.

"Before the accident I would find anything to do that would keep me away from an indoor job...mow lawns, clean gutters, do yard work.

"It allowed me to be my own boss and then I could work my jobs around my ball schedules."

At the time of the accident Taurman was playing in two volleyball leagues, two softball leagues and pickup basket-

ball in a local park at night.

While cleaning roof gutters one afternoon, she slipped off a ladder, cracked her neck against an iron railing and fell down an 18-foot basement stairwell.

"I knew when I fell I was paralyzed because I couldn't get up. It was more or less acceptance at that point because it was just me and the ladder. If it had been me and a drunken driver perhaps I would've felt anger or denial.

"But to this day I have never asked 'Why me?' And I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that nobody else was involved...It was fate and there was nobody to be angry with," Taurman says. "I just decided I would go on."

Going on wasn't any different, she says, than tackling other physical challenges. At first she just wanted to regain strength and motion in her arms, back and neck.

"The one thing I wished for was to get the use of my hands back," says Taurman. "But it never happened and so I've learned how to use adapted utensils to assist me with things like eating, writing...even teeth flossing."

At the urging of a physical therapist, Taurman began to think about the possibility of wheelchair racing in the months that followed the accident. By late summer 1985 she was committed to the idea. Taurman began serious training in February '86.

Today it takes her about 5 minutes to roll through her neighborhood—a course that took 29 minutes to complete in the early days.

During those early months of training Taurman spent the remainder of

her time completing a nursing degree that she had been six-weeks short of receiving at the time of the accident.

"I went on with it...I didn't want the wheelchair to stop anything I considered to be important in my life."

It was during this time that Taurman scored her highest academic achievement—a 4.0 semester.

"Able-bodied I'd never done as well with grades," she says with a grin. "My only problem with the handicap is that people tend to associate the wheelchair with mental retardation and then condescend toward me. That's when I feel prejudiced against...and here I sit with three college degrees." (The nursing degree was preceded by a bachelor of science in biology and complemented with a master of education in family counseling in the spring of 1987.)

Since being elected to the National Development Team, Taurman has traveled to Colorado and Houston for testing and training.

"But the problem is the expense," Taurman says. "It's a real setback that disabled athletes are not paid the way able-bodied athletes are...we're given the opportunity to compete but then denied it due to the expense."

In attempts to overcome this financial struggle Taurman has written and circulated a resume of her athletic career in hopes of persuading sponsors to help her pay her way through international competitions.