

The Strathmore Standard

Sports

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Wednesday, August 31, 2011

Record holder has eyes on Olympics

Josh Chalmers
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Cory Johnson has been telling people for years that anything is possible and limitations are only in the mind, but now he has some tangible evidence to back it up.

The 36-year-old motivational speaker from Strathmore has spent the better part of his adult life overcoming the limitations of Cerebral Palsy and sharing it with the world. In March he unwittingly began to put those words into action when he walked onto the track for the first time in years.

"I've always done a little bit of running before but nothing competitive," said Johnson of his foray into the sport. "I spent most of my life running against able bodied people, for the first time in my life I ran against people who had the same limitations I have."

Five months later he was a Canadian record holder, in the 100 metres for people with his kind of Cerebral Palsy, and what began as a fun outlet and great way to stay in shape has become a mission aimed straight at the 2012 Paralympics in London.

"I'm going to try and qualify for the 100 metres for Olympics this year and after I'm going to focus on becoming an all around track and field athlete," said Johnson.

When he first stepped onto the track it was apparent that he had some differences than his new teammates. Two seemed to rise above the rest, firstly he was 36-years-old in a group of teenagers and secondly, he was the only disabled athlete among the group. But what may seem like physical limitations Johnson looks at as being almost wholly mental.

"When I started running at the track I started using what I was teaching in my speeches, that we set our own limitations and that's what holds us back," said Johnson. "I had to overcome the mental obsta-

cles of thinking what am I doing here... I have to believe that I can win the competition and not let those limitations in my head dictate what I can and can't do."

When Johnson surpassed the Canadian record, he ran a 15.73 second time beating the mark of 16 seconds, others took notice. He said he's been approached by the national team and may end up getting sponsorship through the Canadian government.

"They've never had somebody walk onto a track and break a Canadian record five months later," said Johnson.

Johnson still has a fair way to go before reaching the ultimate goal of 14.7 seconds, the qualifying time for the Olympics, but he only needs to look into his own past for the evidence that it is possible. It's unlikely that a high school aged Johnson saw him being where he is today, married to wife Sandi, a father of two, Brandon, 12, and Emma, 22 months, Western Canadian Governor for Kiwanis, a successful motivational speaker and published author, he wrote *I'm not drunk, I'm disabled* and is writing a children's book.

"I didn't have a lot of confidence (in high school) and I didn't see myself as going very far in the community," said Johnson.

But that all changed after Johnson began volunteering with Camp Kiwanis.

"That was the first time I was in an environment that wasn't based on who is better than who," he said. "I started seeing the possibilities within myself instead of the disabilities... I've gone from having no confidence to where I am today."

Even within running Johnson has already overcome many natural obstacles standing in his way.

"By the time I reach 40 metres my body is shutting down because it's tired," said Johnson. "Everything I do is about 40 per cent harder than



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Cory Johnson broke the Canadian record for the 100 metre sprint for his kind of cerebral palsy five months after stepping onto a track for the first time in years. He is aiming to drop another second off his time to qualify for the 2012 Paralympics in London.

normal people."

Johnson has put together a team to help him along the way including a coach, physiotherapist, sports psychologist and nutritionist and looks at the mission as a team effort. All in an effort to

maximize his potential as he heads towards the ultimate goal of not only making it to the Paralympics but winning a medal, which would require a time under 12 seconds.

"I need to find the best, most efficient, way for me to

attain my goals," said Johnson.

The team effort is apt for the situation as Johnson isn't just doing this for himself.

"Mainly it's for me but it's also for others," said Johnson. "That's what I do in life

is inspire people to see possibilities within themselves and each other. If I can lead by example and inspire other people, that will give me the self-satisfaction of doing a good job at the end of the day."