



## Locals smile thanks to camps for disabled young athletes

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ROCKFORD — Six-year-old Rockford resident Cameron Poole, paralyzed from the waist down from spina bifida, holds up his NASTAR bronze medal and smiles with pride as if it was earned in the last Winter Olympics on the downhill course.

"I love this," Poole said, clinging to the medal he won during his stay in Steamboat Springs, Colo., from March 21-23. "It just felt good."

To hear those words come out of his mouth was the No. 1 goal of his mother, Robin, and his father, Oda, when they signed him up for the Adaptive Adventures Stars of Tomorrow Youth Ski Camp, a three-day snow ski training clinic for disabled young athletes. The camps range in skill level from beginners to Para-Olympic hopefuls, and Poole made it through round one with a smile on his face most of the way.

"To see other kids with the same disabilities as him, doing the same sports, and all of them with a smile, it's such a great experience," Robin said. "To get them comfortable doing the things they don't think they can do, that's just fantastic."

Poole and his camp classmates spent three days working the slopes of Steamboat Springs on a bi-ski or a monoski, getting assistance with the handles, a tether or just vocally during solos. Although he had to slowly build up his courage, Poole's solos were not as nerve-racking as one might think.

"It was kind of easy," he said. "Even when I flipped over, crashing was fun. It was hard to get on the lift, but everything else was easy."

The class worked on getting on and off the ski lifts, controlling and turning the ski and even maneuvering barriers, including NASTAR poles arranged in a zigzagged row down an intermediate run.

It was so easy and fun, Poole and his mother are expecting to sign up for the Adaptive Adventures water-ski camp in July. There is also a youth sports camp in Libertyville in late-June, and lots of other outlets available for disabled athletes, especially since Joel Berman and Matt Feeney started up Adaptive Adventures.

"It's a sports program, but it's not about the sports. It's about their outlook on life and their attitude," said Berman, an amputee who, along with Feeney who was paralyzed with a spinal cord injury, started the Wilmette-based organization in 1999. "Just the look on a kid's face during one of these camps — they always say a look is worth a thousand words, and in this case, it sure is. It makes you feel good."

It also makes a lot of other people feel good, which when dealing with these types of disabilities, is more than half the battle. The Poole family plans to take advantage of more of the Adaptive Adventures' programs, and they hope more families from the area in a similar situation will catch on.

Berman just hopes today's economy won't scare away the ones who really need it.

"We're sure a lot of people out there aren't even aware this exists," Berman said. "And cost can't be the barrier. We make sure of that; if the right person wants to come, and they can't afford it, we come up with ways."

"This is too special of an opportunity to limit."

For information on upcoming camps and how to get involved, go to [adaptiveadventures.org](http://adaptiveadventures.org).

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