

Erie Times-News

# City & Region

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GREG WOHLFORD/Erie Times-News

Firefighter Tony Hunt from Strongsville, Ohio, competes in the team relay Friday at the Coors Light Firefighter Combat Challenge.

# Challenging work

*Erie teams, visitors square off in firefighter contest*

By JULE GARDNER

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And in blue, the announcer said, it's Team Erie.

And blue didn't disappoint.

The Erie Bureau of Fire's best relay team ran its best time ever at the Coors Light Firefighter Combat Challenge Friday night and ended up second overall.

The relay competition of the two-day obstacle-course event on South Park Row whittled teams of five firefighters each to the fastest 16, then the fastest eight and so on. Three of five Erie teams made it through the first elimination.

And "Team Erie" — also called "Team Gorzynski" after Rick Gorzynski, an Erie firefighter and friend who died in January — almost won it all.



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Darren Hart of the Erie Bureau of Fire competes in the team relay of the combat challenge on Friday.

The team of Jacob Stuckey, Darren Hart, Bryan Delio, Tim Romanski and Joe Russo had the No. 1 spot sewn up in front

of a hometown crowd. Until the "flashlight incident."

During a handoff, when Erie was seconds ahead of a Sacramento team in the final run, the flashlight used as a baton went flying. Team Gorzynski fetched it and made up time, but Delio, the last leg and the one who drags the 175-pound dummy to the finish line, dropped "Rescue Randy" about 2 seconds too late.

"They were disappointed, sure, but now they know they can compete with the best in the world," said one of the Combat Challenge organizers, Lt. Bruce Eicher with Ladder Co. 2.

The Sacramento team placed fourth at 2003's World Challenge. This year Erie will also be represented at the challenge's pinnacle competition, to be held in Las Vegas in

► Please see FIREFIGHTERS, 2B

# Firefighters: Erie's teams up to challenge

Continued from 1B

November and aired on ESPN.

At an earlier qualifying competition, Team Gorzynski advanced, as did Eicher, who qualified in the 40 to 50 age category for individual men.

His race continues today at 11 a.m., when the competition featuring more than 200 firefighters from throughout the country and Canada goes solo.

Individually, they'll climb the five-story tower erected on State Street in full gear with a 45-pound hose over their shoulders.

They'll hoist up a coiled hose of the same weight from the ground.

They'll race down and pound a 165-pound sled five feet before running a slalom course around hydrants.

They'll pick up a charged hose, hit a target and drop it.

They'll pick up a 175-pound dummy and drag it 10 feet to the finish line.

Then they'll collapse. Maybe.

Competitors looked strong Friday night, with several to watch today, including those from Erie, Virginia Beach, Sacramento and Canada.

The relays were a little more relaxed, as the crowd rooted for Pennsylvania teams, bought Smith's dogs, pizza and \$2 beers.

Compared to the individual competition, the Friday night relays were "five times the fun and one-fifth the work," the announcer said.

Several from the Erie region participated. The Meadville team looked more familiar than it might have to the city of Erie crowd. Three from the Crawford County team, hung up by recent flooding, were replaced at the last minute.

The "three Mikes" from Erie — Mike Rinn, Mike Fahey and Mike Hirsch — ran with Darren Hall and Jim Aldrich of Meadville, completing the course in a respectable 2:13. It didn't advance them, "but I'm glad we could do it for them," Rinn said.

Competition also heated up at North Park Row and State Street, where the Kids' Crawl Drag & Squirt encouraged the inner firefighter in the form of shorter, scrawnier types.

At the starting line, friends Lonnie Sherrod, 10, and Whitney Flemmings, 11, eyed each other up. Lonnie mouthed "sucker" to Whitney before they sprinted in borrowed fire coats to the inflatable tower.

In the end, it was Whitney who flopped the dummy on the mat first, but barely. "Who's the sucker now," she said. They both laughed and got in line again for another round.

The kids event opens today at 11 a.m. and runs until the individual competition on South Park Row wraps up.

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