

SUNDAY

www.gainesville.com



The Gainesville Sun

SEPTEMBER 19, 2004



LEE FERINDEN/The Gainesville Sun

Bren Resue fires a hose at a target Saturday at the 2004 Southeast Regional Firefighters Combat Challenge.

Demonstrating bravery

Firefighters put their skills to the test in weekend-long challenge

By DEBORAH BALL

Special to The Sun

Gainesville Rescue firefighter/EMT Pat Hartley proved Saturday he still has what it takes to be the best of the bravest.

Hartley turned heads at the 2004 Southeast Regional

Firefighters Combat Challenge when he won first place in the Over 50 Relays in a time of 1:59 with a 2-second penalty for not placing the chopping mallet he used in one of the tasks on the right pad. Despite the penalty, Hartley, 50, said his victory was a sweet one.

"It feels good to win, but it's more of a relief for it to be over," Hartley said.

"There is so much stress and anxiety."

Armed with camaraderie and competitive fierceness, 175 firefighters from the southeastern United States, mostly from Florida, converged on the south parking lot of The Oaks Mall to brave the hot weather in the weekend-long challenge, which ESPN calls the "toughest two

CHALLENGE on Page 3B

CHALLENGE: ESPN will air world challenge

Continued from 1B

minutes in sports."

Wearing "full bunker gear" and a Scott breathing apparatus (SCBA), pairs of firefighters simulated the physical demands of real firefighting. The five-part competition included climbing to the top of a five-story hydraulic tower carrying a 42-pound high-rise pack, hoisting a 42-pound hose roll to the top and descending to the ground floor where they simulated chopping by swinging a 9-pound shot mallet on the end of a 160 pound steel beam.

Competitors then zigzagged 140 feet through simulation hydrants to the fourth station, where they pulled an attack hose for 75 feet over their shoulders. Finally, firefighters dragged a life-sized, 175-pound "victim" a distance of 100 feet to the finish line. If you finish the course, you are considered a hero in Lt. Joe Horton's book.

The 41-year-old Largo firefighter reigns as the 2003 Over 40 Points Champion and reclaimed the title at the Gainesville challenge with a time of 1:49, making him a back-to-back winner in the category. Horton, whose gear was adorned with "FDNY" and "343" in tribute to the 343 New York firefighters who lost their lives on Sept. 11, said longevity was



After completing most of the course, Sherry Jackson of North Carolina collapses with exhaustion Saturday at the 2004 Southeast Regional Firefighters Combat Challenge. She was given fluids, ice towels and oxygen.

the key to his success in Saturday's challenge — his 10th show of the season.

"I'm elated. It's been a great trip," Horton said. "This has been my life, my quest to get to the World Championships."

Horton will head to the World Challenge Nov. 9-13 in Las Vegas, which will air live on ESPN.

Dr. Paul Davis, founder of the event, said the idea for the challenge came to life in 1975 as a project for his doctoral

dissertation in sports medicine at the University of Maryland.

"This is the only federally-funded, university-based research project that became a nationally televised sporting event," Davis said. "We're talking about world-class athletes. The challenges help these firefighters do their job better and makes them more effective public protectors."

Deborah Ball can be reached at (352) 338-3103.

FYI: Area Winners

Local winners at the 2004 Southeast Regional Firefighters Combat Challenge included:

- **Gainesville Fire Rescue** — 2nd place, Women's Team Relay
- **Gainesville Fire Rescue** — 1st place, Over 40 Men's Team Relay
- **Pat Hartley (GFR)** — 1st place, Over 50 Men's Individual
- **Stephanie Hornbuckle (GFR)** — 3rd place, Overall Women's Individual

LEE FERIT/DET/ Special to The Sun