

ARE YOU GAME?

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at Portland Community College. "Rock climbing is very complex. You must constantly calculate how to best position yourself to get up. At the harder levels of climbing your body position is critical. Tense arms, for example, can cause fatigue, which can cause you to fall, so the sequencing is important."

To say the least. The penalty with which Walters spices his descriptions of climbing adventures is none other than death itself.

Walters caught the climbing bug during his first year in medical school at the University of Washington. Due to a series of circumstances, three students, including Walters, were sent to Fairbanks, Alaska, to complete their first year. All three students, he says now with a chuckle, were gay.

"I've always loved the great outdoors," he says. "And I've always liked to challenge myself. I tend to get bored with things where you reach a plateau. With rock climbing, the sky's the limit. Literally."

These days Walters climbs about 30 times a year. Additionally, he's a regular at his indoor rock gym, which offers a course he describes as



Above: Dawn Collins (right) cools down after a sprint

Below left: Fellow climber Kelli Hopkins holds a rope for Marc Walters (top)

"amazingly challenging." He limits his indoor climbs to two per week, however, for fear of snapping tendons.

He attended the 1990 Gay Games in Vancouver, but only as a spectator. He looks forward to the Amsterdam gathering not for the glory but for the opportunity to network with other queer climbers.

He will participate in the two days of eliminations and then, hopefully, advance to the finals in Amsterdam's indoor rock gym.

"In a way I hope I win," he says. "But it would be pretentious to think I'm the best gay climber in the world. In a way I'm hoping to get beat, and beat badly. I look forward to learning from other gay climbers who are better at it than I am."

UP AND RUNNING WITH DAWN COLLINS

BY WILL O'BRYAN

Dawn Collins owes the best decision of her life to the 1990 Gay Games in Vancouver.

"That was the first time I'd been anywhere with that many gay people," Collins says. "I didn't want to leave and go back to the 'real world.'... As a result, I came back and came out to my mom—definitely one of the best decisions of my life."

Going to Vancouver in the first place wasn't such a bad idea, either, considering she brought home a gold medal for softball. She says the trip was "just one fabulous event after another."

Her experience was enough to prompt her to go to the Gay Games in New York four years later "on a whim." But she didn't go to the Big Apple to hit home runs. She went to run.

Participating in a highly competitive, non-team sport proved no problem for Collins.

"I had a great time," she remembers. "I got a bronze medal.... I thought, 'I'm pretty competitive, I like this. Let's go to Amsterdam!'"

And so she shall. Collins is going to the 1998 Amsterdam Gay Games to participate in 100 and 200 meter running events and she hopes to bring home another medal. Collins reckons, however, that she faces two hurdles she didn't have in New York.

"Unfortunately, I'm in the same old division [35 to 39 years old], only older," she laments, adding, "I expect more competition because track is big in Europe."

Age and geography have only managed to take a tiny nibble out of Collins' composure, though. Experience in two previous games has left her feeling prepared.

"I'm definitely much calmer and more focused," she offers. "I know what to expect because I've been, so it'll be easier for me not to be overwhelmed."

Considering this is Collins' first trip to Europe, one might think she'd be more nervous about the trip, but she's taking the venue in stride. She's even added on a few days in Italy for good measure.

Despite her self-assuredness and competitive edge, there's something about the unconventional nature of the competition at the Gay Games that Collins has come to appreciate. Collins explains that she's had a lifetime of athletic experience and that she's very "old-fashioned" about winning and competing, but that the spirit of the games reminds people, "You don't have to hate people to win or to compete.... The games say, 'Hey, we're all here, we've got something in common, let's have a good time.'"

While she says she's grateful that the competition can be fierce, she adds that there is something refreshingly inclusive about the Gay Games camaraderie: "You can still find competition. You can say, 'Wow, I'm out here and I really earned this win.' At the same time, if you're lousy, it's still OK to be there. People still applaud you for being there and trying. That's very rare in sports."

"It's about making friends and participating...meeting people and learning new things...I'm really looking forward to that."

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