

Amputee athlete speaks on courage at first of three women's lectures

Laurie Huffman
January 21, 2010



By LAURIE HUFFMAN

The Review

There was no arguing her excellence or courage while she was swimming, ski racing, climbing mountains or running in marathons. Even without one of her legs, no one could say she had any limitations or was different from other athletes as she raced downhill on skis at 60 to 70 mph. That's why Sandy Dukat of Canton went back into the world of an athlete after her years at college, during which time she felt disabled for the first time in her life. Yet, now, after a sports injury took that life away from her, she views the future as another new adventure. One that may take even more courage than she had to summon to become a bronze and silver medalist.

Dukat was the guest speaker at the kick off of the 2010 second annual Women's Impact Lecture Series, which took place on Wednesday in the Conference Center at Kent State Stark Campus in Canton.

Her right leg was amputated when she was almost 4 years old, she told an enraptured audience. Still, she pushed herself because she said she didn't want to miss out on all the fun in life.

Her idea of fun included climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in 2007; earning three bronze medals and coming in fifth overall in 2004 while ski racing in the World Cup; winning a silver medal in 2007 ski racing in the World Cup in Aspen, Colo.; earning a bronze medal ski racing in the Paralympics in Italy in 2006; and earning two bronze medals in the Paralympics in Salt Lake City in 2002. Not to mention winning a world and national triathlon championship in 2008 and running her first marathon in Arizona in 2009.

Dukat said she learned early on the embarrassment of removing her prosthetic leg, and even once having it taken away and misplaced while she was working out, was worth it.

"We all struggle with self worth," Dukat said during her talk. "Having a disability taught me a lot about confidence and about success. I was a good student and also a good athlete due to my attitude. I have learned with a positive attitude, determination and dedication, you can do anything, and my parents taught me there are no excuses."

Dukat said she received strength from her family and from the community in Stark County where she grew up. Once arriving at college she said she felt, for the first time, out of place.

"I had the information I needed, but when we are faced with a decision, how do we react? Dukat asked. "At age 24, I asked myself if I should go back into sports again, where my heart was. Some would have said no, I should probably go forward now. But that's not how my parents raised me.

"And there is nothing so special as standing on that pedestal with a bronze medal in your hand. I got there thanks to my parents and family and community, where no one ever once said to me I couldn't do something.

“That made me more courageous than I ever thought I could be.”

Dukat admitted she believes vulnerability is the true test of courage. “Putting yourself in a position where you don’t know the outcome leads to strength and to courage,” she said. “The greatest obstacles are those we put in front of ourselves. And we really don’t know who we are until we test our abilities.

“What do we do with opportunity?” she asked the crowd of women in the conference center. “Do we make a plan and dare to be ourselves?”

Dukat said to be a success you need to make a plan. So, she made a plan to mentor and be a role model for young people who need her support as she enters the next phase of her life. And she noted she feels as adventurous as ever as she moves forward to the next chapter in her life. She wants to work with parents and kids with disabilities and with young women and men who are disabled and be a role model for them.

“When I was on top of Mount Kilimanjaro, I felt great and believed nothing could stop me. Every day we have mountains to face. Your choice is your attitude. Courage is a choice. It’s your choice whether to have courage or not. I challenge you to dream big and to live alive,” Dukat closed.

The Women’s Impact Lecture Series is sponsored by the United Way Women’s Leadership Council, Ohio Women’s Bar Association and Stark County Bar Association. United Way Women’s Leadership Council is sponsored by Diebold.

The Wednesday lecture was the first in a series of three, with the next lecture to take place from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Feb. 17 and the third at the same time on March 17. Both will again take place at Kent Stark Conference Center. Registration may be handled online at www.owba.org. Cost is \$25 per person or \$200 for table sponsorship.

Moderators at the Wednesday lecture were Judge Sheila Farmer and Judge Julie Edwards of the 5th District Court of Appeals.

Judge Pat Delaney, also of the 5th District Court of Appeals, was instrumental in bringing the lecture series to Stark County, modeling it after a series she was a part of in Columbus before becoming a judge in Canton three years ago. This is the second year for the series, and she admits it has been a smashing success.

“We need programming geared toward women on leadership issues because women enjoy listening to other women and learning from their experiences,” said Delaney.

Some of the guests at the Wednesday luncheon and lecture included employees and clients of the Timken Company, Diebold, Aultman College, Raymond James Financial Services, KeyBank, Day Ketterer Ltd. and Mercy Medical Center.

The topic for the Feb. 17 lecture will be “Impact Through Wellness.” In March, the topic will be “Impact Through Prosperity.”