

ERNIE JOHNSON

Age: 37 years old

Tumbling & Cheer Coach/pursuing motivational speaking

I was born and raised in Conway, South Carolina. I come from a family of athletes. Both of my older brothers wore the number 34, as did I. After my football accident in August of 1997, Conway High School retired the number 34 in a Johnson Family tradition. My oldest brother received a scholarship to play college football; my other brother received a scholarship to run track. I played basketball and football. I was being looked at by some major universities to play football, but on August 21, 1997 (3 days before my senior year). Everything changed when I broke the C4 vertebrae of the spinal cord in a preseason football game. That accident left me a C4-C5 incomplete quadriplegic.

I began weight lifting as a freshman in high school. About a year after my accident, I began lifting again. It wasn't until 2013 that I started lifting to compete in wheelchair bodybuilding.

How did I get over the challenges I faced?

Family! Faith! Friends! Community! I had an amazing support group. From August 21st till October 3rd I had at least 10 visitors and there were days where I had 40 to 50 visitors. My mom, my sisters, my brothers, my high school, and the city of Conway took care of me when I got home. I was probably a bit spoiled; the Mayor of Conway even named November 16th Ernie Johnson Day. I was also blessed with resilience and a positive attitude.



Photo by npnewsline.com

How did I get into Bodybuilding?

I was up late one night looking for things to do in a wheelchair and I came across Wheelchair Bodybuilding. This was about four weeks before the CJ classic in West Palm Beach. I gave the promoter, Frank Dalto, a call and he strongly encouraged me to come to the competition. Since my first CJ Classic, where I placed 4th in novice, 4th in physique, and 2nd in middleweight, I have done three competitions. In 2013, along with the CJ Classic, I competed in the Palmetto Classic in Columbia, South Carolina. I placed 1st place in that competition. Later that year, I competed at Jen Hendershott's Classic in Charleston, South Carolina. I placed 1st in that competition as well. In 2014, I only competed in the CJ Classic. I placed 5th in that competition.

“ While I was unconscious after my spinal surgery, the doctor told my mom I would be lucky if I could move my arms after a few years of therapy.”

Who inspires me?

I am my favorite person. Who really inspires me is a loaded question. I'm inspired by something and someone different everyday.



Something I never thought I could do?

Almost everything. While I was unconscious after my spinal surgery, the doctor told my mom I would be lucky if I could move my arms after a few years of therapy. I got more function back in the first two weeks after my surgery than the doctors thought I would get the rest of my life.

The most appealing answer is probably surfing. Thanks to Brock Johnson, Luke Sharp, Brian Hughes, Kelly Rhodes, Kelly Richards, Caleb Reed, Tyler Watkins, and host of other people. I am ranked the 8th best adaptive assist surfer in the nation. I began adaptive surfing a few months after my first bodybuilding competition. I got that competitive itch again. I have now surfed in South Carolina, Florida, and California. The least appealing answer is vacuuming.

Future Goals

My short-term goals for 2018 are: get first place in the first ever quad division at this year's CJ Classic, win the national adaptive surfing title in San Diego, start competing in hand cycling, and start my career in motivational speaking.

Long-term goals...Olympics!!! I would like to qualify for hand cycling in Tokyo in 2020, and qualify for surfing in Paris in 2024 for surfing and hand cycling.

Final Thoughts

I am only an inspiration if something about me causes a positive change in your behavior.

Become your favorite person!