

Man on a mission

When Frank Bollinger '51 was a boy, doctors said he'd never be able to walk again. Later, doctors told him he'd never live to the age of 40. He proved them wrong on both counts. Rightly so, at age 78, Bollinger doesn't take life for granted. With more than 900 medals from competing in the Senior Olympics, he hasn't slowed down.

At 4 years of age, doctors gave Bollinger's parents the news that he had contracted the poliovirus.

"The whole right side of my body was pretty much paralyzed," Bollinger said. "The doctors said I wouldn't ever be able to walk again."

However, by the time Bollinger reached high school in Excelsior Springs, he was a four-sport athlete, playing football, basketball, baseball and track and field.

After high school graduation, a heart condition kept Bollinger from military duty during World War II. His doctor even told him he wouldn't live past the age of 40.

Bollinger, not willing to sit back and wait for the worst to happen, enrolled at Northwest where he majored in agriculture while competing

for legendary Coach Ryland Milner on the track team. Primarily a pole-vaulter, high-jumper and discus thrower, Bollinger was part of the 1949 and 1950 Hall of Fame teams that won both the indoor and outdoor conference titles.

After graduating from Northwest, Bollinger, who had since passed his Army physical, enlisted in the military and served for two years.

When Bollinger was relieved of his military duties, he and his wife settled in Excelsior Springs where they raised their five children. During that time, Bollinger remained active with hang gliding, scuba diving and competitive downhill skiing.

It wasn't until 1995 that Bollinger competed in his first Senior Olympic event in Kansas City.

"One of my friends asked me if I could still high jump," he said. "I said I thought I probably



could, and as it turned out, I set a record that first time."

Since then, there's been no slowing down and no looking back.

Bollinger has competed throughout the Midwest, attending about 10 events a year, racking up medals and making friends along the way.

"It's the friendships that make competing so much fun," he said. "Everybody tries like heck to win, but nobody gets mad when it's over. We just go out and try to win the next time."

Bollinger competes in many events, including the high jump, discus, hurdles, 100- and 200-meter dashes, pole vault and long jump. By practicing nearly every night, Bollinger has won about 930 medals.

"I'd really like to reach 1,000 medals before I quit doing this," he said. "In a couple of years I turn 80, and the competition thins out a little bit."

Jacqueline, his wife of 54 years, disagrees about his plans to hang up his cleats.

"He won't stop when he gets to 1,000," she said. "I don't believe that at all."

Bollinger admits the word "quit" may be easier to say than do, considering it's something he's refused to do his entire life.

"Well, the doctors told me I'd never walk again, and I beat that," Bollinger said. "Then they said I wouldn't live past 40, and I beat that, too. I'm proud of the accomplishments I've made to even be able to do what I'm doing, so I'm going to keep competing for as long as I can."

Whether Bollinger reaches the 1,000-medal mark isn't important. After all, he's defied the odds and is a champion of life. ■



(Above) Staying active and practicing daily in his backyard has enabled Bollinger to win nearly 1,000 Senior Olympics' medals.

(Top Right) Just as he did as a student-athlete, Bollinger winds up to throw the discus. Bollinger competed in the pole vault, high jump and discus for the 1949 and 1950 Northwest M-Club Hall of Fame track teams.