



2017 Personal Best Athlete Profile

Ed True, 85

O'Fallon, Illinois

Tried and True

As you read through Ed True's life history in the conversation below, it becomes clear that the multi-faceted man has never found himself wondering what to do next with his life. It's also evident that he has made the most from every turn he has taken.

His mantra for happiness and success in life is simple: Don't do anything you don't enjoy doing.

There's a lot of things Ed enjoys, based on his accomplishments. The father of five recently celebrated the 50th anniversary with his wife Myrna, who went to college at age 54 and just obtained her PH.D. He enjoyed sports on his way through high school and college, and then saw the world while serving as a flight instructor with the Air Force. He played and coached basketball during that time, and even helped one country start the sport. His business degree landed him a second career working for the banking industry, and he started a small construction business to keep busy. His next step was to begin teaching college business courses, which continues to this day.

That's just scratching the surface of Ed's journey. He served as an alderman of his town for 19 years, and on school boards for 28 years. His interest in youth development led him to participate in the Rotary International youth exchange program, helping students come to study in America. On the side, he has been teaching with Junior Achievement for over 40 years.

We're still not done yet. One of his most enjoyable pursuits has been his participation in the Senior Games Movement, both as an athlete and organizer. As soon as he reached the minimum age (55 at the time), Ed started with the Southwestern Illinois Senior Olympics, and within three years he was elected president of those games. The same year he began, he heard about the St. Louis Senior Olympics and took the short hop over the Mississippi River to join in the fun. In 1985, he participated in the formation of the board that helped create the first national multi-sport event for seniors which made its debut in the Arch City in 1987.

Thirty years later, Ed True continues to enjoy the National Senior Games, and is among a select few who have competed in every one. When he stacks it all up, Ed True credits his ongoing sports participation for keeping him healthy and fit to be able to continue in his many pursuits. It can do that for you, too.



Photo: Zachary Kelly

Ed, thank you for spending the past three decades with us. Tell us how you got started with sports.

I've always played sports. I've always competed. I played football, basketball and ran track when I was in high school. I was too busy to play in college, but I did play basketball and later coached teams while I was in the Air Force. My team actually won the European conference three times. The Air Force puts an emphasis on keeping physically fit. I was a pilot and served as a flight instructor for most of my career, which was 20 years. I was in Europe for 11 years and in the Far East for a time.

Interesting sports-related story from that time: While I was coaching in England I was asked if I wanted to go to Ireland to help introduce basketball there through the U.S. State Department. I said, 'Of course I will.' The country was just starting out with it at the junior high level at the time, so it was a great opportunity.

Really! Now we know why Ireland is such a basketball powerhouse.

[Laugh] Funny, the kids would start dribbling down the court and halfway across they would kick the ball, because that's what they were used to doing with soccer. Another thing that was foreign to me was that most of these 14-year-olds were smoking during those times. Now, Ireland has banned smoking in their country.



What did you do after returning from your military service?

I was hired by banks in the Federal Reserve District of St. Louis to set up their automated clearinghouse. Everything was done with checks at that time, so what I did was the forerunner of direct deposit, ATMs and point-of-sale systems. I also had a little construction business before I started teaching about 17 years ago.

I was also an alderman for my city [O'Fallon, Illinois] for 19 years, and served on school boards for a total of 28 years. One thing I'm proud of was raising the funds and building a new sports complex for my town in 1987. It was the first place in the north where you could play softball indoors. There was even an article about it in *Sports Illustrated*.

I do a lot of other things to stay active, too. I still teach business courses four days a week at different universities around St. Louis. I also work with a Rotary North American Youth Exchange Program, and my territory includes six states and Toronto, Canada. This year I have 70 students from eight Asian countries- 35 coming in, 35 going out. I primarily help with obtaining their visas, stuff like that. There's also an annual conference that moves around North America, and this will be the ninth year that I've been the program chair for it. I do get to travel with the program. In the past three years I've been to Bangkok, Sydney and Sao Paulo.

Oh yes, I have been teaching for Junior Achievement for 41 years now. That's just one hour a week in local schools. And my hobby is repairing clocks. I have repaired about 500 over the last 40 years

Good Grief, Ed. You sure have kept yourself busy. When did you ever get rest between business, civic, family and sports activity?

Well, I, ah, I didn't sleep much. [Laugh] But that was alright. I have a philosophy: I don't do anything that I don't enjoy doing. To me, all this is sort of an extension of Senior Games. I don't know that I would have been this active if I wasn't so involved with Senior Games. It keeps me mentally active too.

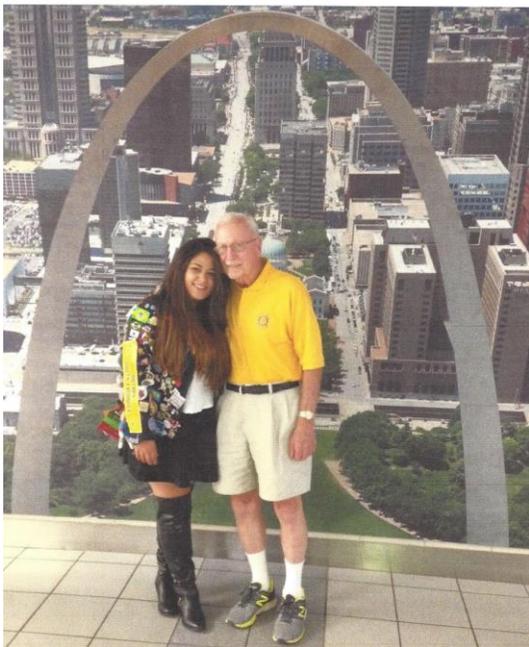
How did you get started in Senior Games? Are you impressed to see how it has grown over 30 years?

Yes, very much so. I was involved in the very beginning. Right when I turned 55, I read in the newspaper about the Southwestern Illinois Senior Olympics, which were run by Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville. So I competed there in a few sports. In fact, after three years they asked me to be the president of their games.

The same year I started, I also found about the much bigger St. Louis Senior Olympics, so I came over the river and competed in them every year. That's where I met [national games co-founder] Harris Frank and he said they were going to be starting national games. I said "OK, I'll be there."

I was actually on the original board for the National Senior Olympics for the first few years by virtue of my role with the Southwestern Illinois games. It was just a small group when it started out, mostly local people.

When they started using state games as national qualifiers, Illinois started up their games in Springfield. I was also chairman of Illinois Senior Olympics for about three years.



Ed acts as guardian for one exchange student sponsored by his Rotary Club each year. He poses here in 2015 with Mikhella Flores from Mexico, his 30th such guest.

Well, thank you for helping as much as you have to get the ball rolling. What sports did you compete in when you entered national competition?

Track and field initially, and I remember I did medal in the 100 meter dash. I also bowled. It wasn't until later on that I got involved with shuffleboard, the sport I've done the last few years.

One thing that really impressed me from the games in 1987 was a blind lady that was out on the track. She had a fellow running along with her, tethered arm-to-arm. She ran along well and it made me think, "Boy, this is the type of thing that's great for everybody."

How did you feel the first games went?

The atmosphere was great. I did wonder what was going on and what we were supposed to do at times. It wasn't nearly as organized as the later ones have been.

Do you have any favorites among all of the National Senior Games?

I really have to say all the games have been my favorite. I've enjoyed and taken something away from every one.

What is the main reason why you have kept doing this?

If I had to sum it into one word, I would say "fun." Everything I've done I've enjoyed, especially the people I've met. Some you only see every two years, and it's like an "old home week" reunion. Friendly competition is what I really like. If you come in second in the race, you're going to be the first one to congratulate the winner, that type of thing. There's very few people that take it too seriously, and that keeps the competition fun.

It makes sense that you like to play doubles with a partner at The Games.

I've had several along the way. For many years, my bowling partner was Alice Perdus, who is unfortunately no longer with us. She was quite a bowler, kept about a 200 average. Naturally, we always won. So doubling with her was an easy way to get a gold.

My current shuffleboard partner at Nationals is Alice Carroll from New York. My local shuffleboard partner used a cane and a wheelchair and it was just too much for him to go to nationals any more. So I called your office looking for a partner, and that's how we got together. We got the gold the very first year.

What attracted you to keep going with shuffleboard?

Well, it's a lot more than just pushing the disc down the court. There is some strategy to it, and I've seen others use different strategies. I know mine works for me.

I'd like to keep doing track at Nationals, but I often have summer teaching jobs and can't be away for more than a few days, so it's hard to stay longer to do two sports.



Photo: Zachary Kelly

You mentioned the blind runner. We bet you have had a lot of special moments over the years.

Oh yes. I had a track friend named C.L. Bruce. He taught me the triple jump, even though we are in the same age division. About five years ago we were competing to qualify in a race in the Missouri Senior Games. As we were going down the track, it looked like we were going to be 2nd and 3rd. He said, "Here, hold my hand," so I grabbed his and we went across the finish line holding hands. We brought the house down.

Do you have any plans to retire from sports?

As long as I'm able, I'm going to keep competing. I don't know how long that's going to be, but I'm looking to compete at 100.

If you didn't do senior sports, what do you imagine your life would have been like?

I probably would not have been as dedicated to stay physically fit. It makes me always want to stay fit. I go to our local YMCA at least 5 times a week. I pride myself on keeping my weight down. A lot of my contemporaries like to watch TV. I'm not a big TV watcher.

What would you say to someone about getting involved in The Games?

I do get asked quite a bit, especially people I meet at the Y. When I ask why they aren't doing it, they say, "Well, because I don't know what I could do." There's a lot of sports you can do. You don't know what you can do until you try it. Go for it.

From hearing your story, it's clear you've always been willing to try something new.

Definitely. That is what life should be about. Senior Olympics is just an extension of that.

So here's our closing question: Do you have a stunt double like in the movies? It's hard to believe all of the things you still pack into your life!

[Laugh] No, no stunt double. I don't think anyone would want to be my double. [Laugh]

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