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Rocky Mountain Cycling Omnium this weekend

By PETER MARCUS - May 26, 2006

After Colorado resident Matt Updike was involved in a severe car accident over eight years ago, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down, he kept a lot bottled up inside.

"I think if you asked my friends and family if it was hard on me, they would say it wasn't, but it definitely was. I didn't want to come across in a negative way," he said.

Shortly after completing rehabilitation at Craig Hospital in Denver, specialists turned Updike on to the sport of handcycling, and it was an immediate burst from his shell.

"I said, 'I like this sport,' and I started racing," he said. "I made the U.S. handcycling team and I race for Invacare and today I'm sponsored by Master Card."

This weekend, beginning today in Denver and running through the surrounding Rocky Mountain foothills Monday, Updike and fellow racers will take part in the 2006 Rocky Mountain Cycling Omnium, an integrated cycling event featuring more than 400 athletes with and without disabilities. Updike is a co-founder of the event and has raced in it since its beginning seven years ago.

The event is hailed as having one of the largest handcycling events in the United States. This year, for the first time, the Omnium has been designated as the American Cycling Association's Colorado State Senior Men's State Criterium championship and as a Handcycling World Cup event — the only World Cup event in North America for 2006.

Updike will be requalifying for the U.S. handcycling team in his division this weekend. Already he's traveled to places like Europe competing with the team, but he's thirsty for more.

"It's huge for me. It gave me a whole focus, a goal to achieve," he said.

What's unique about the Omnium is that it pairs able-bodied amateur and professional cyclists with disabled cyclists at the same venue, on the same courses, racing in front of the same crowds. Cyclists can compete either in the handcycling or able-bodied cycling division and take advantage of clinics led by expert instructors, many of whom have disabilities themselves.

The main events are the ACA Colorado State Senior Men's

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State Criterium championships and the Handcycling World Cup, featuring the best handcyclists in the world. The three-day race, which includes 12 different race categories for cyclists of all abilities, features a time trial, a road race and a criterium finale through the downtown streets of historic Old Towne Golden. Crowds will gather along the street Monday to cheer on the cyclists.

"The one goal is all about integrated sports," said Ian Lawless, executive director of the U.S. Handcycling Federation. "The whole idea behind the Omni is that it puts cyclists with and without disabilities together at the same event. It's a big party."

For a complete race schedule or for more information, visit <http://cycling.adaptiveadventures.org>.