



Local Boy Wins National Championship and International Competition in Water Ski Jumping

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Last month, a local twelve year old boy became the first St. Louis area Illinois skier and only the second Illinois skier to win the under 14 boys ski jumping title in the American Water Ski Association National Championships, held this year in San Marcos, Texas. Later in August, Will Roberts joined Zachary Butterfield from Texas as the only two boys in representing the United States in the seventh annual CanAm Challenge on the Under 13 American team that also included four girls from Florida and Texas. That competition, won handily by the Under 13 U.S. Team, has been hosted each year at Lake of Dreams, just south of Jerseyville. In that competition, Will bested the other boys in his age group by 25 feet, soaring 114 feet off the ramp, his personal best jump in competitions bettering his 111' jump at U.S. Nationals two weeks earlier in Texas.

Will Roberts, son of local attorney and businessman Jeff Roberts and his wife Sandra, has an older sister, Nellie (14) and younger brothers Edward (10) and Michael (5). Will has topped the national rankings for the boys under 14 jump event since August of 2013, despite being two years younger than his oldest competitors. The River Bend area is deep in talent in Junior competitive water skiing. Will's neighbor, Brett Stackpole, is currently ranked second and little brother Edward is ranked third in the national jump standings. Consequently, Lake Richard in tiny Dow, IL boasts the top three Under 14 jumpers in the country and five members on the Midwest Region's Junior Elite Team, with Sammy Stackpole and Nellie Roberts joining the three boys on the 16 member team from the 12 state Midwest region.

Water ski jumping is one of three events in competitive water skiing, along with slalom skiing and trick skiing. In the jump event, skiers are ranked according to the distance of their jumps. At each tournament, a skier has three attempts in the jump event. The longest of those three jumps is the score for that tournament. For boys in Will's age division, the maximum boat speed is 28 miles per hour. However, by pulling from the

far side of the towboat across the wakes to the jump, Will can accelerate to a speed of over 50 miles per hour at the base of the jump.

Will began ski jumping at age six on a miniature version of the large jump ramp used in competitions. Nellie started at age eight and Edward started at age four! At night, Will studies You Tube jump videos of professional water ski jumpers and, during the summer days for the past six years has put into practice what he learns from those films. At age 9, Will was ranked 7th nationally in the Under 14 age group when he jumped 97 feet, the longest jump by a 9 year old in the history of the sport. Will is also ranked fifth nationally in the overall competition, which combines his points in all three events.

