

Technology will help St. Cloud man 'sing' anthem

Reed will perform before Twins game; he has cerebral palsy

By Frank Lee

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Tom Reed has faced challenges before, living with cerebral palsy, but he has never faced one quite like this.

Reed, a 39-year-old St. Cloud resident, will perform the national anthem tonight at a Minnesota Twins game against the Oakland Athletics in Minneapolis.

The game will be at 7 p.m. and on ESPN and Fox Sports Net.

"The song is pre-programmed into my Pathfinder communication device. I just press a button to

'sing.' It sounds easy, but I'm still nervous!" said Reed, a member of the United Cerebral Palsy of Central Minnesota's board of directors.

The Pathfinder by the Prentke Romich Co. resembles a laptop computer with its keyboard and color display.

Reed appreciates the electronic device's built-in vocabulary, which helps those with the brain-related disorder communicate with others.

For this interview, Reed responded using e-mail.

"Just because we may

have difficulties communicating, people think I can't understand them or can't be independent," said Reed, who uses personal-care assistants to help him with daily activities such as dressing, feeding and showering.

The thought of performing "The Star-Spangled Banner"—a notoriously tricky composition to sing for even professionals—would reduce most to a quivering mass.

Reed has refused to give up since he was a toddler diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

"Granted, there are some days I wish I didn't have cerebral palsy, such as when my computer or electric

chair or my communication device breaks down, but if I didn't have cerebral palsy, I don't think I'd be the person I am today," Reed said.

Reed was offered the chance to perform when the executive director of the state affiliate of United Cerebral Palsy recommended him as part of an annual "disabilities awareness night."

Reed became a Twins fan 11 years ago when he had a chance to meet the team, and he has followed the professional baseball team ever since.

"They have a positive attitude like me. I like them all. It's just not one player. It's (their) teamwork," Reed said.

Reed hopes fans at

What is cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy is a group of motor problems and physical disorders related to a brain injury that occurs during fetal growth, birth or within the first years of a person's life.

It is one of the most common of all congenital disorders. About half a million Americans have cerebral palsy, which causes uncontrolled reflex movements and muscle tightness that may

affect a part, a side or the entire body, with varying degrees of severity.

There is no cure for cerebral palsy. A lifetime of treatment is often needed to help manage symptoms, prevent complications and maximize abilities through the use of medications, surgery, special equipment and devices, physical therapy and/or individualized training.

Source: WebMD

tonight's home game will have a good time, but that they also will learn something about those with cerebral palsy.

"Please talk and treat us the same as you would as any other person. We are just like anyone else, but we do it a different way!" he said.



Tom Reed

Will sing at
Twins game