



## AAC Publications

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### **Belayer Pulled Into Climbing Wall**

Colorado, Denver

**On July 23, I broke my foot and ankle in two places while belaying another climber. I was working with a nonprofit at a Denver multisport event involving disabled veterans.** I set up their mobile climbing wall to use with a gentleman who had had a stroke the year before. He had hemiplegia (a form of paralysis that's a common after-effect of a stroke) resulting in severe weakness on the right side. For climbers such as himself, I set up a top-rope with a static rope so I can provide a power belay, without dynamic stretch.

The man was able to lift and grip a bit with his right hand. He was much bigger than me, and when asked he claimed to weigh 245 pounds. I weigh 145, so I was not concerned about the difference. He climbed to about two feet from the top (22 feet total) when he slipped and fell back hard. I was standing three feet from the center line to keep the rope off his back. When he fully weighted the rope, I slid over the gravel and was lifted like I'd held a leader fall. I quickly put my foot up to stop myself on the wall. The force fractured my heel and navicular bone. My doctor believes I was slightly off center and my foot hit at a weird angle. Had I hit flat, it would have been fine.

I didn't want the man to know he had injured me, so I lowered him and sat down. He wanted to climb again, so I put him on an auto-belay. Once he was finished, I told a staff member my foot was broken. I hopped away, got a ride to my car, and drove to the ER in Fort Collins.

### **ANALYSIS**

Later I looked at the man's online registration form, and he had listed his weight as 320 pounds. If I had known that he weighed more than twice as much as me, I would have anchored myself to the base before belaying and maybe used an Edelrid Ohm to reduce the impact force of any fall. I also might have kept my shoulder against the wall so that the force was up, not up and in.

But the main takeaway is, if the climber is much bigger than you, anchor yourself before belaying, even for a top-rope. Protect yourself at all costs. (Source: Craig DeMartino, age 56.)

**Editor's Note:** DeMartino's lower right leg was amputated after a climbing accident almost 20 years ago. He is the first amputee to climb El Capitan in under a day and is a two-time National Adaptive Climbing Champion.

**Images**

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