

Constable: Grayslake native leaps to 'Frogger' glory

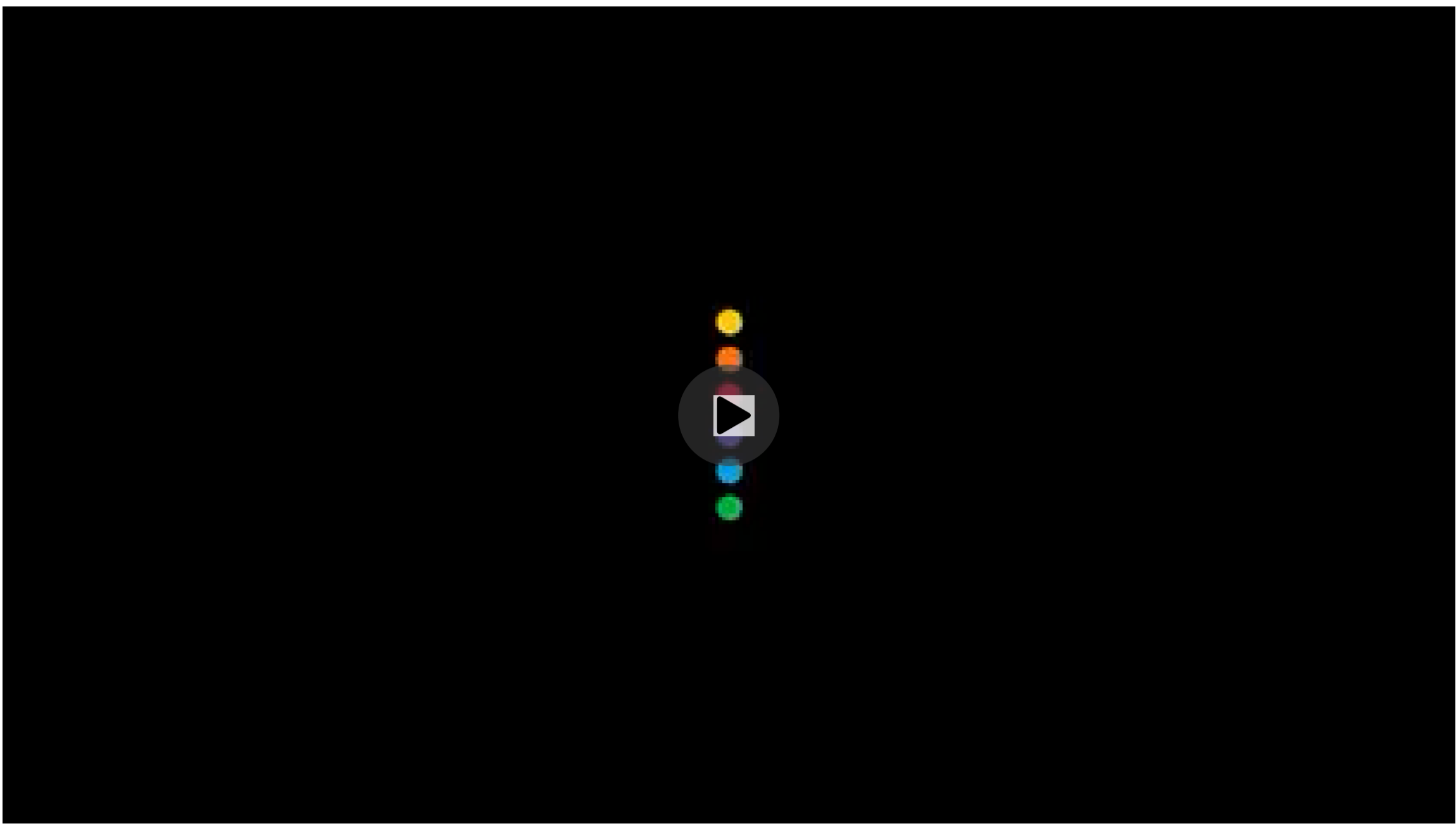


Flying through the air on a giant parrot comes naturally to circus acrobat and dancer Kevin Beverley of Grayslake during this episode of PeacockTV's "Frogger" competition. (Courtesy of PeacockTV)

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Burt Constable

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Not many careers prepare you for surfing on the back of a slippery plastic hippo, flying through the air on a giant parrot, leaping from moving fake alligators to spinning lily pads, surviving water cannons, eluding the Thundertruck, and stealing Boss Toad's idol to win PeacockTV's "Frogger" competition.

"I literally jump on people and catch people for my job, so I thought I could be good at this," says Kevin Beverley, 31, who grew up in Grayslake and studied gymnastics and dance before launching a career that has taken him on tour in more than 50 nations as an artistic circus acrobat. He was more than good on the game show based on a 1980s arcade video game.

"Kevin Beverley, you are the Ultimate Frogger Champion," proclaimed Damon Wayans Jr., who hosted the show along with Kyle Brandt, the Stevenson High School graduate who played football at Princeton University before becoming a media personality. Wayans and Brandt presented Beverley with a golden fanny pack containing \$100,000 in cash prize money to go along with the \$10,000 he won during an earlier episode.

Beverley, currently performing in the show "Backbone" with the acclaimed Gravity & Other Myths circus troupe of Australia, ignored early invitations to be on "Frogger," just as he ignores other pitches from television talent shows.

"I haven't busted my butt for my whole career to go on a silly game show," Beverley remembers thinking. "Then I thought about it in more of a fun way."

The pandemic shut down his circus tour, and "Frogger" was filmed in Sydney, so Beverley said, "OK. I'm going to do this."

The youngest of three boys born to John and Toni Beverley, he took gymnastics as a boy. "I was good, but I had a lot of fear," he says. Brothers Michael and Steven excelled at sports at Grayslake Central High School, but Beverley put his talents toward dance, and spent his final two years of high school at the Chicago Academy of the Arts. He performed in shows and competed in dance competitions.

"But I really felt there was something missing," Beverley says. He saw a television special on Cirque du Soleil in 2006, and found his calling.

"I don't know what this is, but this is what I want to do. This has everything. It combines theater and dance and acrobatics," Beverley says. He'd take the train to school, but two days a week he'd leave before dawn to drive from Grayslake so he could take after-school classes at the Actors Gymnasium in Evanston. He remembers how his hands hurt holding the steering wheel on his drive home from his first day of the grueling gym class.

"It was one class and I was like, 'This is what I want to do. One-hundred percent,'" Beverley remembers.

After graduating from high school in 2008, he studied at the New England Center for Circus Arts before being accepted into the prestigious Ecole nationals de cirque (National Circus School) in Montreal, where he graduated in 2012 with a major in dance trapeze, and a minor in hoop diving.

He's been a member of many circus companies, including The Seven Fingers, Midnight Circus and Cirque du Soleil, before moving to Gravity & Other Myths. He was told his skills would make "Frogger" easy.

"Then when I got there, I was like, 'That is not true.' Everything is soaking wet, so everything is slippery," Beverley says of the obstacle course that resembled the arcade video game of a frog trying to cross a busy road and navigate a hazardous river. And at 5-foot-10 and 170 pounds soaking wet, which he often was, he found himself going up against basketball players, muscular gymnasts and other athletes. The show featured six dozen contestants.

"I'm an artist. I look at the world through an artist's eyes. But I'm very competitive," Beverley says.

"Think about all these years of training. I'm very good at landing with my hands, my knees and my body because that's my job."

His closest competitor couldn't match Beverley's landing skills.

"He fell off the turtle," Beverley says.

Excited to be going back on tour with Gravity & Other Myths, Beverley says he is investing his prize money.

"I've been working as a professional circus artist for nearly 10 years. I've broken my toe three times. I have a herniated disc in my back I deal with," Beverley says. "This is Plan B money to me. What are you going to do when your body can't do it anymore?"

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