

# National Veterans Wheelchair Games



## Athlete Profile (National)

### It's Time to Compete for Jamey Bollinger

Ask Jamey Bollinger what sports he is competing in at the 2006 National Veterans Wheelchair Games and he won't know. Ask him why he competes at the Games though, and the 27-year-old quadriplegic has a ready answer.

"I like the Wheelchair Games. It's a lot of fun and there is always something new to try. There are so many other people in wheelchairs that it is amazing," Bollinger said. "At the Games, everyone is in a wheelchair, so I'm just one of the guys."

Camaraderie and a chance to make new connections are the thrill of the Games for this Alton, Illinois Army veteran. He looks forward to the competition as well. He just doesn't know yet what he'll be competing in.

"I told my coaches to surprise me," Bollinger said. "I have therapy sessions every Tuesday and Thursday at the VA Medical Center in St. Louis, so they have had me doing a lot of stuff every week. They had me try bowling so I have a good clue there, but I could be in the powerchair relay and not know it right now. Of course, I'm in my chair every day so I think I will be prepared for it."

This year's Games will be Bollinger's second, and although he medaled in the motorized wheelchair rally last year, the Iraqi Freedom veteran hopes to get more physical this year. "I'm sure I'll still look like a rookie out there, but I'll give it all I've got," Bollinger said. "The old-timers are so advanced and have so much experience in their chairs, it's hard to beat them – but I've got to try."

Bollinger is not just after his fellow veterans' medals, but he looks forward to the chance to pick their minds as well. "There's a lot of guys I met at last year's Games from Iraq that are my age and I hope to see them again this year," Bollinger said. "The Games have allowed me to make great connections with all kinds of other veterans."

With those connections have come tips that have made Bollinger's life on wheels easier. "I just like the atmosphere and talking to all of the other veterans," Bollinger said. "I learn a lot of things, too. They tell me different ways to do things that makes life easier for me back home."

The best tips Bollinger received on his first trip ranged from dealing with utensils to dealing with seating at restaurants, but the most valuable advice Bollinger received from his fellow veterans was how to deal with other people. "People look at you differently when you are in a wheelchair," Bollinger said. "It's hard to deal with, but talking about it and the advice I got from the other veterans made it easier when I got home."

In the end, Jamey Bollinger hopes he will leave the 2006 Games with great memories and perhaps also, some gold medals. However, he also hopes he can be an inspiration for other veterans to give the Games a try. "You have to try everything at least once," he said. "Most of the time, if you just try something even once, you are going to like it."