

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Eugene Tatom – An All-Around Winner!

Eugene Tatom, a 63-year-old Marine Corps veteran from Philadelphia, fought bravely for his country during the Vietnam War. He was stationed at Paris Island, Camp Pendleton and Okinawa before he was sent to the front lines of Vietnam. One evening, Tatom volunteered to take his group out on patrol. On their return, he was leading the group when his foot suddenly sank into the ground. Since there was no moonlight that night, Tatom did not realize he had just stepped on a land mine. The device exploded and tossed him some 20 yards from where he had stepped.



Despite having back and leg injuries, neurological damage and severe arthritis, Tatom will again compete in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games this year. The 27th National Games are taking place in Milwaukee in June 2007, marking Tatom's third year competing. He first heard about the event from his physical therapist at the VA medical facility in Philadelphia, where he receives medical care. Last year, Tatom returned home with two gold medals, one in swimming and the other in basketball.

As an active member of the "Philadelphia Magee 76ers" wheelchair basketball team, Tatom stays in shape by being on the court nearly year-round. It is the swimming event for which Tatom more deliberately trains, trying to get in the water about four times per week. With two-year-old grandson Madison visiting weekly though, he admits he's been missing some sessions at the pool. "He keeps me on my toes though – my alertness has definitely increased," he says laughing. "His energy never stops."

It sounds like his progeny comes by it honestly. Before his injury, Tatom was very active, saying that he enjoyed fencing, rowing, track, field, football, swimming and several other sports. He has also competed in a variety of wheelchair sports for the past 21 years. "Sports are my life," he said. "Well...sports and family." Once again, Tatom's wife, Alberta Scott-Tatom, plans to be by his side in Milwaukee. "She's my number one fan," he says. "I am my number one critic!"

Although he has been competitive his whole life, Tatom claims he is trying to "tone it down a bit" and take more time to relax. "If I ran the show, everyone would get the same thing," he says. "Win or lose, I love my brother and sister vets. We're all winners!"

Eugene Tatom has a gold medal outlook on life, saying, "I look forward to having fun with all of the men and women who have served our nation." Still, it is not just his positive attitude that consistently puts him in the winner's circle – his skills on the court, in the pool and on the field have clearly made him a victor as well.