

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (Local)

Arron Powless – Meeting the Challenges of Life is all He Knows

In high school, Arron Powless, of Shawano, Wisconsin, liked keeping active in sports like wrestling, softball and intramural basketball. Now 35, Powless still enjoys the activity but has switched his events to sports like quad rugby and wheelchair slalom. The competition is just as tough. Especially for this 35-year-old Air Force veteran who now competes as a quadriplegic.

Powless enlisted in 1990 seeking a military career in the security police. That career was cut short in early 1993 by an automobile accident during an off-duty weekend. At the time, Powless was stationed at K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Any inactivity from the devastating spinal cord injury was short-lived, however. It was only months later that doctors began encouraging Powless to participate in the 1993 National Veterans Wheelchair Games. He agreed, starting out with some non-jarring events like swimming. That was just the beginning. Like many wheelchair athletes, Powless got what he calls "Games fever," and has returned to the annual event twelve times since. He says now, "I gained pride and found out that I could still do good things in sports despite my injury." He came home from last year's Games with five gold medals in three swimming events as well as quad rugby and slalom.

These days, Powless shares his talents with youngsters enrolled in the Youth Adaptive Sports Association in Green Bay. Started only two years ago, he volunteers to help get youth in wheelchairs involved with both basketball and quad rugby clinics as well as other sports. He also works with adults and kids in *Challenge the Outdoors*, a group that offers shooting events to wheelchair users including clay and trapshooting, turkey and pheasant hunting, and others. Powless enjoys sharing his talents and abilities with both organizations as a coach and mentor.

That's how he sees himself at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games as well. He believes that every athlete benefits from just being there, and he likes mentoring the new participants. His advice to a newly injured veteran is, "Try it out. You never know if you don't try. There's so much new equipment and at the Games, you can come and get information and 'test drive' new equipment and devices that you otherwise wouldn't be able to." He's found that most of the athletes are really open to letting others try their new equipment and adaptive devices. He feels it's one of the great benefits from being involved in the Games, and strongly encourages all newly injured veterans to come to the event and see for themselves.

This year Powless will enter three track events, quad rugby and wheelchair slalom. "I'm really glad that the Games are close to home (this year) so that my family and friends can also see me participate," he says. Married to wife Jenny, Powless takes occasional college classes in Menomonee, seeking to become a microcomputer specialist.