

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (Local)

Kenneth Matthews – Now He Gives Back

Wheelchair athlete Ken Matthews was first introduced to the idea of playing quad rugby while he was still in his hospital bed following a 2003 car crash. "A member of the Milwaukee Iron (a local quad rugby team) came and invited me to join them," he said. "After a month of therapy at the VA Medical Center, I went to a practice just to watch. I started playing soon after."



Now, with practice twice a week just for the rugby team alone, Matthews, who is 59 and lives in Belgium, Wisconsin, continues to keep himself busy. In addition to quad rugby, which is one of the more challenging sports for quadriplegic athletes, Matthews has also signed up to compete in the 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, coming to Milwaukee June 19-23, 2007. His third time attending the event for U.S. military veterans, he plans to enter the swimming competition again this year in both backstroke and freestyle, as well as table tennis, the wheelchair slalom and one of the new exhibition events, wheelchair curling. "I have friends who are always asking me to go curling with them, so having it at Milwaukee is exciting," Matthews said. "I have always been fascinated with curling, so it is great to finally have the opportunity to try a new sport."

Having been a soccer official prior to his injury, Matthews appreciates the fact that he can continue doing something athletic. After competing in his first National Veterans Wheelchair Games in 2005, Matthews described the experience as "surprising and rewarding." He was overwhelmed by the real sense of competition among the athletes, which was always followed by congratulations and an enthusiastic reception. "There is a good strong competition, but yet the athletes embrace everyone, regardless of their level of play. We are just warm comrades."

While that is certainly true, the camaraderie hasn't deterred Matthews from managing to collect an impressive array of medals his first two years at the Games, coming home with three gold, three silver and three bronze in 2005 and 2006. Perhaps due to his experience officiating, Matthews also feels the need to bring new members into the quad rugby team to keep it competitive. He mentors recently injured quadriplegics and encourages them to stay active. A combat veteran of Vietnam, Ken Matthews is continually encouraged by the athletes themselves. "You do see some impressive accomplishments," he observed. Well said, from someone who's made many himself.