

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Darrell Lawrence – Adapt and Overcome



Darrell Lawrence is a 29-year-old Army veteran from Gresham, Oregon, and a first-time participant in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, being held this year in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Formerly a Crew Chief of a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter unit which served in Iraq, Lawrence was injured while his unit was transferring from Ft. Campbell, Kentucky to Hunter Army Airfield in Georgia. “After my accident, I was in a complete state of disbelief and denial that I would be in a wheelchair for the rest of my life,” Lawrence said. “However, I am discovering that with adaptive activities like the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, I can work through and around my limitations.”

Although his spinal cord injury rendered Lawrence a paraplegic, he has signed up for five activities at the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games including air guns, wheelchair slalom, handcycling and two swimming events. “I have always tried to do my best at anything I commit to. However, I am really looking forward to some friendly competition.” While serious competition is one important aspect of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, it is not the only one. Lawrence refers to the camaraderie he discovered as a participant at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic earlier this year. “I get a lot of satisfaction from just spending time with other vets in a situation similar to mine – in a wheelchair. Many of the vets at the Games have achieved a lot of success since they were injured. It is 100 percent motivating and uplifting.” Lawrence says that he has learned a lot from the other veterans, from maneuvering their wheelchairs to learning how to utilize their veteran’s benefits.

Lawrence was an active high school athlete, competing in both football and wrestling. Entering the Army allowed his competitive spirit to flourish. Now, he has rediscovered that through activities such as the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, he can still compete with others. “Having a goal like participating in the Wheelchair Games helps me look forward to the future,” he says. One event that Lawrence is particularly looking forward to is the wheelchair slalom, a challenging obstacle course that tests agility, skill, speed and strength. He says, “That will be challenging, as there are obstacles on the course that I face daily. Navigating narrow thresholds, curb-hopping and wheelchair maneuvering are skills that must be practiced in order for me continue to develop my capabilities.” To prepare for the Games, Lawrence has been going to the gym with some of his friends, swimming in the pool and doing some target practice with air guns at the VA medical facility in Seattle.

Lawrence currently receives his health care at both the Portland and Seattle campuses of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System. “The VA therapists at both have been extraordinarily helpful to me,” he said. “My first nine months of rehab were very hard, but I continue to realize that I must find new ways to adapt – and overcome.”