

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

George Norton – If You Sit, You Rust!

You're not likely to see 63-year-old U.S. Army veteran, George Norton, sitting around being a bystander –in sports or in life. You'll see him on the basketball courts, playing softball or, of course, at the 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games taking place in Milwaukee, June 19-23, 2007.

"Without question, the Wheelchair Games has been one of the most significant events in my life," Norton says. "I love playing and teaching the younger men and women how to play adaptive sports. Some of the best athletes in the world enter these competitions."

Norton, a native of Rhode Island and currently living in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, volunteered for the Army in 1966. He became a member of the Army's 9th Infantry Division and worked as a demolitions expert in Vietnam. He was injured while working on a Fast Patrol Craft, also known as a swift boat, along the Mae Kong Delta. These teams would work to identify North Vietnamese Army (NVA) clusters that were impeding on the South Vietnamese villages' quest for a democratic society.

"Our job was to protect the villages from the NVA," Norton says. "We would go into areas that had been identified as having large numbers of NVA soldiers. We would draw their fire, which would reveal their exact locations. Then, calls for U.S. air support were made so that these obstacles could be removed. In one location along the Mae Kong, on December 30, 1966, my team began taking sniper fire from the North Vietnamese. We retreated back to the boat as quickly as we could, but it was not fast enough. I was sniped and the bullet went right through my ankle. I woke up five days later in a hospital in Saigon without my left leg."

As someone who was always motivated by challenges, and recognizing the therapeutic value of activity and involvement into a team effort, Norton reintegrated sports into his life as soon as possible after his injury. "God blessed me with a love of sports and the ability to compete," he said. "Because of my continued involvement in sports, I am still in very good shape and plan to compete as long as I possibly can. Each year when the Games are over, we all start preparing for next year. It totally changes your life forever."

This is George Norton's 17th year competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. "The Games are a first class event," he says. "Some of the best athletes in the world enter these competitions. Friendships made at the Games, both old and new, can be terrific, meaningful and everlasting." Watch Norton this year in Milwaukee, as he once again races down the basketball court helping his team be the best they can be – and making new friends along the way.

