



Athlete Profile (National)

Scott Winkler – Paralympic Hopeful

Scott Winkler, a 34-year-old Army veteran from Grovetown, Ga., recently returned from the Paralympic Military Sports Camp in Colorado Springs, Colo. He was one of more than 20 veterans training that week for the Paralympic Games in Beijing, the Olympic equivalent for world class athletes with disabilities. Thanks to efforts by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the United States Olympic Committee, veterans who participate in VA's national rehabilitation special events like the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, now have a venue in which to carry on and advance in athletics, furthering their service to their country despite their disability.

Winkler joined the military when he was just 21 years old. In 1994, after completing basic training at Ft. Jackson, S.C., Winkler began his military career as a cook stationed in Korea. In the late 90s, Winkler decided to take a break from the military and return to civilian life. It took him two years to realize that he still belonged in the military, so he rejoined at Ft. Stewart, Ga.

In March 2003, just as the United States entered Iraq, Winkler was sent overseas to Tikrit. He worked as a driver, transporting everything from people to ammunition. Just two months later, while transporting ammunition, he fell off the truck and injured his spinal cord.

Directly after being injured, Winkler took part in extensive rehabilitation and was even able to walk. In December, however, Winkler underwent invasive surgery because doctors discovered lesions on his spine. He woke up paralyzed from the chest down, but he has not let his condition get him down. Today, he works with the Augusta Paralyzed Veterans of America, helping set up outings for other veterans with disabilities.

Athletics is another outlet that has helped Winkler. He first got involved with wheelchair sports through some friends who invited him to play wheelchair basketball. He excelled at competition and in October 2006, was invited to the military summit at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado. He has even been picked up by the field events team and recently broke two national records in the shot-put and discus. Winkler still plays basketball, but now only for a cardio workout to help him excel in his field events. He's set his sights high – at the end of June, he will compete at the U.S. Paralympics track and field national championships in Atlanta. This event is a qualifier for the Parapan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil this August.

Scott Winkler will attend the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for the first time this month. "I've heard a lot about it," he said. "I've just been looking forward to getting out there and having a lot of fun." Winkler, who is scheduled to help with Kids Day at the Games at the Milwaukee County Zoo believes in the importance of mentoring young children with disabilities. "There's a lot of stuff for people with disabilities to get out and do. We just have to get out there and do it!"