

# National Veterans Wheelchair Games



## Athlete Profile (National)

### Charles “Buddy” Mays – Getting Back to Basics

A sudden and dramatic life-altering event can cause a person to lose sight of what is important when it comes to healing the mental and physical self. Charles “Buddy” Mays, a 33-year-old Army veteran from Meansville, Georgia, knows that getting out and rediscovering your abilities are two important things and he is applying those basic ideals to his own life.



Mays is returning to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for his third year and attributes wheelchair sports to improving his quality of life. “I’ve had so much fun at the Games before and I really enjoy the competition,” he says. “I like to be around everybody there, especially so many other veterans in wheelchairs. It allows me to not only challenge myself, but also build some new friendships.”

While serving in Iraq, Mays was on patrol when the Humvee he was riding in ran over an improvised explosive device, blowing him from his position in the gunner's hatch and throwing him approximately 30 yards from the vehicle. The convoy stopped and provided medical attention to Mays and others. After he was air lifted to his base in Baghdad and stabilized, he was flown to Bagram Air Force Base in Germany. Injuries to Mays' spinal cord left him paralyzed from the waist down. Two of his friends were fatally injured in the sudden explosion.

Despite his injuries, Mays now attributes wheelchair sports to improving his quality of life. “I really didn't play a lot of sports in high school,” he says. “After my injury, I had a very hard time accepting my disability. “Participating in wheelchair sports really helped elevate my spirit and brought me out of a depressive mode.” Mays is grateful to his recreation therapist at the VA medical center in Dublin, Georgia. “She recognized that I had lots of potential, ability and drive, and suggested that I participate in VA's national rehabilitation events,” he said. “It was one of the best pieces of advice I have gotten since my injury.”

It didn't take long until he became addicted to this active way of life. “It's a large part of my lifestyle now,” he says. “I like to do anything to push my limits.” At last year's event, he came home with a silver and a bronze medal. This year, he competes in handcycling, basketball, air guns, slalom and nine-ball. “Slalom is a big challenge and one that I enjoy the most,” he says. “I really want to qualify for the Super G slalom this year. Nine-ball (another favorite) is my game and I want the gold medal this year!” To train, Mays spends a great deal of his time on his handcycle. Keeping up with his two young daughters requires him to be in top form as well.

Physical benefits aside, Mays finds the social aspects of the Games to be very important. “Socializing with the other veterans is a big part of participating for me. This is often the only time I see some of my closest friends. It goes all the way back to basic training, where one of the main points taught was that you are always together, regardless of where you are located.”