

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

George Norton – More Than a Fan

With a gruff but good natured voice, George Norton pulls you into his stories like priceless works of art that demand to be looked at. You quickly gain the sense that all of Norton's stories are important to him. When he talks about sports, however, it is clear that his anecdotes about competition and being around other athletes are among the most important.

Norton's love of sports began early. He looked back on the time spent on sports as an adolescent and with amusement said, "If I spent the time on schoolwork that I did on sports, I'd be a doctor by now." He follows up quickly, saying, "Life takes you in many different directions and there's a reason for it."

The medical world's loss is the sports world's gain. "I love playing and teaching the younger men and women how to play adaptive sports," Norton said. "Some of the best athletes in the world enter these competitions." His view on being a team member transcends sports, and heads into life. He puts it this way, "An individual will not survive but as a group, we can take on the world."

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. "In one location along the Mae Kong my team began taking sniper fire from the North Vietnamese," he said. "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."

Norton remembers the time after his injury and the impact getting involved in sports again had on his outlook. "I felt bad for myself," he said with solemn contemplation. "I was stumping my own growth, physically and mentally." As he explains, his excitement increases. "I got started playing wheelchair basketball at the VA hospital about 19 years ago. It was like being born again."

This is Norton's 18th year attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and he looks forward to competing again in basketball, javelin, discus, table tennis – where he earned a gold medal in 2007, and softball – finishing with a bronze medal last year. In true athlete fashion, Norton is adding an exhibition event this year, sled hockey. "I'm anxious to try that because I'm a hockey fan," he said.

George Norton is clearly more than just a fan – in every sense of the word, he is an athlete.

