

# National Veterans Wheelchair Games



## Athlete Profile (National)

### Jared McCoppin – Engineering His Way Through

When an unexpected obstacle is put before us, many people conclude that it is impossible to reach the other side. Jared McCoppin, though, an Air Force veteran from Fairborn, Ohio, has a 'do what has to be done' perspective, coupled with the keen analytical mind needed to find a way to the other side – be it over, under, around or through.

In 2004, while working as a communications technician at Cape Canaveral, Florida, and also on his bachelor's degree in material engineering, McCoppin, 32, was injured in a motorcycle accident that left him with a broken back. As proof of his seemingly unflappable nature, his first concern was not the devastating accident, but school. McCoppin says, "My biggest worry was my calculus test and needing to contact my professor."

Stationed in Turkey during Operation Northern Watch, McCoppin is relaxed and nonchalant about his disability. Before he was injured, he already had a friend who used a wheelchair and that helped him adjust. "Fortunately, I already had a best friend who was disabled," he said. "I didn't know my limitations or abilities, but knowing him helped because I had an idea of what to expect."

The 28<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Omaha, Nebraska, will be the first for McCoppin, and he credits the nurses at VA Medical Center in Dayton for getting him involved in the Games. "They told me I would have fun, so I'm going to try it," he said. Although he is prepared to participate in the upcoming Games, he's generally not keen on competition. "I don't like to compete," he says. "But I do want to compare myself to others so I can gauge what my abilities are and learn how other veterans do things." To really do that, he knows he needs to join the roster of more than 500 other competitors attending the 2008 Games, and he's signed up for the air guns, swimming, table tennis and handcycling events.

McCoppin recently graduated with his degree in material engineering and is now working on his master's degree in mechanical engineering, attesting to his stamina and perseverance. "I always just picked up the pieces and moved on," he said. "I don't really think about my injury much – I'm too busy."

Using his engineering background, McCoppin compares having a disability to someone who needs to use a ladder to get to an object that is out of reach. "It's not that you can't get it, you just need to find another way to do it," he said. "I try not to focus on what I can't do, but how to do whatever it is that I need to."

