

Athlete Profile (National)

Jim Milliken – Hooked on Competition

Jim Milliken, a 61-year-old Army veteran from South Bend, Indiana enjoys his free time. In fact, he plays a little golf, gardens and swims about three times each week at his local YMCA. But it's not all fun and games for Milliken — it's *preparation*. And Milliken is definitely preparing for this year's National Veterans Wheelchair Games, taking place in Omaha, Nebraska this July.

"I have been competing in wheelchair sports for more than 30 years," he said. "After my injury, it was wheelchair sports that got me out and active again. It made a big difference in my rehabilitation and my life in general."



While serving in Vietnam, Milliken was on patrol when an explosion went off behind him. Along with Milliken, two fellow soldiers were also severely injured. Despite immediate surgery, doctors were unable to save his legs and Milliken came out of surgery a double amputee.

Winning is a goal for many wheelchair athletes competing in the Wheelchair Games, and Milliken has certainly enjoyed his own share of the fame. An accomplished athlete, in 1988 he was selected to be a part of the Paralympic swim team in Seoul, Korea.

"Winning doesn't mean that I always beat all my competitors," he said. "It sometimes just means that I beat my personal best swim times. If I beat the timing goals I set but someone else wins the race, then I'm still happy with myself." At the 2006 National Veterans Wheelchair Games, he took home four gold medals in swimming and did the same in 2007. He hopes to repeat that performance at the event this year in Omaha.

"It's definitely the competition that got me hooked on the National Veterans Wheelchair Games," Milliken said. "I always look forward to coming to this event because of the large number of athletes and the tremendous spirit you feel being a competitor here. It's more fun to participate in events when it's all veterans who went through the same things together."

Milliken also competes as a member of a YMCA swim team, often against able-bodied people nearly half his age. This will mark his 16th year participating in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, and his advice for newcomers is simple: "Enter lots of different events and try new things. See what you enjoy and what you excel at."

While Jim Milliken is clearly hooked on the stiff competition of the Wheelchair Games, according to him it's really the "friendships and great camaraderie" that keep him coming back.