



## Athlete Profile (National)

### Tyler Wilson – Shooting for Success

Tyler Wilson is a 23-year-old Army veteran living in Thornton, Colorado, who will compete as a first-time wheelchair athlete in the 28<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Omaha, Nebraska this summer.

While serving as an infantryman in May 2005, Wilson was wounded in a firefight in Afghanistan. His unit flew into the Arghandab Valley in Chinooks to suppress insurgent activity. The troops were ambushed after they exited the helicopters and a firefight broke out. Wilson and others from his unit had fought for eight hours before being wounded. Wilson was hit three times – once in the chest, once in the leg and once in the back. During the battle, his sergeant was also hit by enemy gunfire, along with two other soldiers from the unit.

Wilson was medically evacuated to Kandahar, where he underwent multiple surgeries to stabilize his condition. Later, he was transferred to Landstuhl, Germany for further medical attention. His initial disorientation from the trauma was quickly replaced with the shock of incurring such a severe injury. The shot that struck him in the back had left him paralyzed from the waist down. Eventually, Wilson was transferred to Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C.

By June 2005, Wilson was discharged from the Army and admitted into the spinal cord injury unit at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Once there, he developed a new life mission. Realizing that his strength and spirit had waned in the time he'd been bedridden, Wilson committed himself to re-strengthening his body, mind and spirit. "The Albuquerque VA spinal cord injury staff were so professional and caring," he said. "They helped me learn to deal with my injury and taught me so many things about getting around in a wheelchair." During his stay, Wilson met several other veterans with similar spinal cord injuries and they quickly became his inspiration. "I figured if they could be involved in the community and active in sports after their injuries, so could I."

Wilson has since returned to Colorado where he continues to receive care through the VA medical facility in Denver. It was one of the physical therapists there who told him about VA's national rehabilitation special events, which include the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. "It was an easy sell," Wilson says. "I think that being around a bunch of other people in situations similar to mine will be uplifting and inspiring. I am really looking forward to rolling into Omaha."

He is ready to compete at the Games this summer and has already registered for five events. As a longtime and avid shooter, Wilson will compete in air guns, trapshooting and archery. "I figured this would be the most natural set of events for me to start with, since I shoot fairly regularly at the local gun range," he said. He will also compete in nine-ball and bowling. "There are so many adaptive events that are available for us to compete in. I've been looking forward to getting some exposure to some of the other activities and seeing if there are others that might interest me in the future." Although he's still a novice wheelchair athlete this year, Tyler Wilson hopes to attend the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for many years to come.