



Athlete Profile (Local)

William (Dave) Gardner – It's Not Just Basketball!



William Gardner, 55, a husband and father of three girls, enjoys many things. He is a musician who plays guitar, bass and mandolin. He is a singer and recording artist. He's also been an athlete in the past and soon, will be one again.

Gardner grew up in a law enforcement family in Claremore, Okla. He attended Claremore Junior College and Cameron College while living in Oklahoma, and joined the Marine Corps in 1973. "I loved the idea of the military," he said. "My grandfather was in the military and was wounded in World War I, and my uncle was in the Marine Corps. My father was not able to serve, so I went in his place."

Based out of Camp Pendleton, Calif., Gardner served in many roles as a Marine. He was in reconnaissance, infantry and police, and was a helicopter door gunner. He was also very active in sports. He ran track in high school and was a long distance runner. In the Marines, he continued with distance running, earning multiple 100-mile club awards. He trained to participate in an Iron Man competition by running, weightlifting and swimming out to the coral reefs in the nearby Pacific Ocean.

Gardner had recently re-enlisted and was planning on a 35-year career in the military. He was stationed at the Marine Corps Air Station in Camp Kaneohe, Hawaii, when he was asked to transfer some paperwork to another division on the island. There was no military vehicle available so he took his motorcycle. Just six blocks from the base gate, a car with two teenagers ran a stop sign, crashing into the motorcycle. Gardner's back and neck were broken. After extensive healing, he was initially able to walk. He returned home and, in the family tradition, embarked on a career in law enforcement. Because his back continued to deteriorate, he could no longer pass the stiff physical requirements of law enforcement so he became a security guard. When his back continued to deteriorate, he switched careers and became a security consultant for Pinkerton, providing consulting services to Compaq Computers.

Now in a wheelchair, Gardner will participate for the first time in the 2008 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Omaha this July. After learning about the Games, Gardner discovered that the event offers a wide variety of wheelchair sports. "It's not just basketball," he said. He plans to compete in air guns, archery and the motorized wheelchair rally. "Archery will help me build my arm strength up so I am stronger and can more easily transfer seats," he said. His goals for his first wheelchair sports competition are straightforward. "I want to win, but even more I want to meet others and have some fun. If I medal, well that would be great, too!" As is the case with most athletes, sports competition provides multiple benefits. "I feel a sense of accomplishment knowing that I can do this," Gardner said. "I will get the chance to meet a lot of people who were also in the military. We understand each other."