

Skier Profile

Luis Rodriguez – Keeping Busy With Something Meaningful

Finding true meaning in life is something most people hope for every day. Luis “Rod” Rodriguez, 35, is one of those individuals who knew right away just where to find that meaning. “I always knew I wanted to be a soldier,” he said. “It was just something that was meant to be.” Originally from San Juan, Puerto Rico, he joined the ROTC program at the University of Puerto Rico at 18. There, he trained for three years to be a combat medic and joined the U.S. Army as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1990. Rodriguez served in the 101st and 82nd Airborne, toured in Germany, and most recently, returned from duty in Mosul, Iraq

Rodriguez had been stationed in Iraq for approximately eight months, when, on November 24, 2003 his three-vehicle convoy came under fire. He was in the passenger seat of the vehicle when a bomb exploded three feet away. He lost his right leg above the knee during the explosion. “I felt helpless,” Rodriguez remembered. “I prayed with all my heart, but mostly I was concerned about my fellow soldiers.” After about five minutes of heavy gunfire, Rodriguez was pulled out of the truck and rushed to a military hospital in Iraq. From there, he was treated in Landstuhl, Germany for six days before being sent to Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C in December 2004.

Only a year and a half after losing his leg, Rodriguez will join more than 350 other disabled veterans in Snowmass Village, Colo. for the 19th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. He credits his participation in this year’s Clinic to the event director, Sandy Trombetta. “I was only in Walter Reed for one week when Sandy stopped by to visit,” he said. “Sandy came by frequently and was very encouraging even though I had never skied before.” Being from Puerto Rico, Rodriguez has never participated in cold weather sports but is extremely excited about trying snowboarding, downhill and cross country skiing. He is most looking forward to interacting with other disabled veterans. “The Clinic will be a chance for me to see how the other guys do it, both mentally and physically,” he said. “Everybody has their own way of processing their injury. It will be a challenge at the Clinic to see how far I can go.”

Before his injury, Rodriguez was very active in sports. Today, despite the new challenges he faces, he continues to stay active by visiting the gym regularly and occasionally getting out to jet ski, ride ATVs, hunt and participate in other activities. He partly credits his continued recovery to the strong support of his wife and two young daughters. Luis Rodriguez encourages other disabled veterans to continue with their rehabilitation, but most importantly, to “go out and keep that mind busy doing something meaningful.”