

# Athlete Profile

## David Vidana – Coming Full-Circle

David Vidana, a combat Marine veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, is not supposed to be alive. Pronounced dead twice after being shot in the head by a sniper in Baghdad in April 2003, Vidana's desire to live triumphed over his life threatening injury. As a radio operator, Vidana's helmet was pierced while he was relaying orders from his commander. After being thought dead for 12 hours, a faint pulse was detected.

It was then that CNN medical correspondent and neurosurgeon Sanjay Gupta, M.D., who was embedded with Vidana's unit while covering the war, performed impromptu surgery that saved the wounded soldier. "I owe Dr. Gupta my life," said Vidana, who is now 26. "I know it's a miracle that I'm alive and a miracle to have made such progress in my physical and occupational therapy."

Only one year from the date of his injury, Vidana found himself at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, conquering the slopes of the Rocky Mountains. "At my first Clinic, I expected to perform well," Vidana said. "I was able to snowboard and go cross-country skiing. I had the time of my life. Snowboarding was better than I ever expected because of the atmosphere and the attentiveness of the instructors."

Receiving care at the Department of Veterans Affairs medical facility in West Los Angeles, Calif., Vidana has made leaps and bounds in his rehabilitation this past year. He credits the Winter Sports Clinic with giving him support during those difficult months. "At last year's Clinic, I met other marines from other conflicts with different types of injuries, who shared great insight and perspective," Vidana recalled. "It helps meeting people who understand what you've been through. For a while I didn't think I was going to be able to walk – and then a year later I was snowboarding!"

Vidana continues to belie the affects of his injury. "I've started running again and have become much more active," he said. "My goal for the Clinic this year is to not use the rider bar or need as much assistance from the instructors during my snowboarding." At the 2004 Clinic, Vidana also scaled the climbing wall, took scuba lessons and told his story to the Veterans History Project, where it was recorded for the archives in the Library of Congress.

A college graduate from Los Angeles who holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Southern California, Vidana is now studying for the final exam to become an occupational therapist. "I was in occupational therapy after my injury. There is a great need and it would be a wonderful opportunity to give back to a field that has helped me during my rehabilitation, coming full-circle. I want to be an occupational therapist now more than ever."

