



National Disabled Veterans

# Winter Sports Clinic



## Skier Profile

### Johnnie L. Williams – A Strong Man Hits the Slopes

Johnnie L. Williams is one strong man. Just watch him bench press. Staying in shape and being healthy are important to this Tampa native. Athletic both before and after his spinal cord injury, Williams, 24, is determined to stay active and sustain his strong competitive spirit. An Army veteran, Williams served in Operation Iraqi Freedom where he was injured. Since then, he has remained athletic. He is able to bench press 360 pounds and won several gold medals from two years competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Now, Williams continues to push himself athletically by registering to attend the 2007 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass Village, Colo.

Williams joined the U.S. Army in June 2001. Following basic training at Fort Benning, he was stationed at Fort Gordon where he received training in satellite communications. After completing that training, Williams was sent to Germany for three months and in February 2003, was deployed to Iraq.

On May 5, 2003, Williams was injured when the Humvee he was driving as part of a convoy was sideswiped by what was believed to have been a civilian-operated vehicle. He lost control of the vehicle and, in the accident that followed he sustained a spinal cord injury that resulted in him becoming a paraplegic.

Williams was retired from the Army at the rank of Sergeant. He underwent rehabilitation at the spinal cord injury center at the James A Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa.

Williams had only been injured little more than a year before entering the field of wheelchair athletics. His success was measured in gold that year at the 2004 National Veterans Wheelchair Games, taking home his division's top-prize in weightlifting. Now, he believes that his tremendous upper body strength will aid him when he challenges the Rocky Mountains in April. "I think I will have more stability with the outriggers (i.e. ski poles) because I lift weights," he explained.

The 2007 Clinic will mark Williams' first time attending the world-class rehabilitation ski event. "I've skied before with my injury, but I wasn't healthy enough to enjoy the entire event," he said. "This time, I want to take full advantage of this great program so I can learn more from my instructors and try out some of the equipment for advanced skiers." Williams says that attending events like the Clinic are good for his spirit. "I enjoy the camaraderie between the younger veterans and the older veterans. When you're among your peers, you're really in a safe zone."

When he is not on the slopes, Williams plans to actively participate in the event's alternate activities. "I'm really interested in trap shooting and trying to improve my shot," he added. To stay healthy and have success at events like the Wheelchair Games and Winter Sports Clinic, Johnnie Williams maintains a regular exercise regimen. "I take care of my body by eating right, lifting weights and surrounding my spirit with positive people." Now that's good advice for anyone!

*Miracles on a Mountainside!*



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