



National Disabled Veterans

Winter Sports Clinic

Skier Profile

Ryan Coffield – Man of Steel

He sounds like your average 22-year-old guy. He enjoys hanging out with his friends, working on his car, playing X-Box 360, and taking an occasional trip to the shooting range. But, this newly discharged Army veteran is far from typical.

“I was born in Indiana, but don’t tell anyone,” he said in a charming southern drawl. For Ryan Coffield, his accent is not the only thing that has changed about him in recent years. On May 28, 2002, just four days after his high school graduation, Coffield enlisted in the Army. It was not until January 2005, that he was deployed to Iraq with “a very special unit.” He had been stationed in Korea when his new unit went on the initial invasion into the Middle East, making it the unit’s second deployment to Iraq, Coffield’s first.

In October 2005, Coffield was checking for contraband when one of the drivers was fired at by a nearby sniper. Coffield, a certified sniper himself, was sent to the rooftops to locate the shooter, but before he could do so, he was shot in the neck. Transferred from a field hospital in Iraq to Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center, in Germany, Coffield finally ended up at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. The bullet broke through his vertebrae, leaving him a quadriplegic, and requiring the insertion of two titanium plates and three steel rods in his neck. The steel and titanium are strong, but it is undoubtedly Coffield’s mental strength and positive attitude that keep him going.

“At first, I was in a wheelchair. I had difficulty walking because the left side of my body was so weak,” he said. “But, I keep a good sense of humor and try not to let this stuff discourage me.” His optimistic outlook serves him well, because after physical therapy at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center in Augusta, Georgia, he says he is almost back to 100 percent.

In March 2006, his unit received its third orders for Iraq – it would have been Coffield’s second. “I miss being with my buddies,” he said of his old unit. The other thing this Midwestern-born veteran misses is the snow, but “only kinda.” In April, he will travel from Fayetteville, Georgia, to Snowmass Village, Colorado, to participate in the National Disabled Veterans Sports Clinic, where there will be plenty of snow.

“I like the mountains, and I like to hike,” he said. “I’m really excited to see the Rockies. I’ve never had the opportunity to get out there before.” A former wrestler and long distance runner, Coffield is also proud father to a one-year-old son. “As he’s learning how to do things for the first time, so am I,” he said. Coffield will hit the slopes on a snowboard at this year’s Clinic. “I’ve never really done it before, so we’ll see how it goes.”

Miracles on a Mountainside!



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