



NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES

National Competitor Profile

Robert Hugee – The Man with the Midas Touch

Army veteran Robert Hugee seems to have the Midas touch as far as his table tennis prowess is concerned. Every time he competes in the sport at the National Veterans Golden Age Games, he wins gold. A six-time consecutive gold medal champion in the sport, he's ready to win again this year.

"While playing a sport I love, I am able to connect with old friends, make new ones and communicate in ways that only soldiers can," Hugee says. "I have always enjoyed athletic competition, the thrill of victory and even the agony of defeat." But that doesn't happen often. To keep his game competitive, he practices with local college students who have affectionately nicknamed him "Grandpa." Never content to sit on his laurels, he also competes in shuffleboard and air rifle at the Games.



Hugee started playing table tennis late in life. In 1992, he was homeless and struggling with substance abuse. A counselor suggested table tennis as an activity that could keep him busy and help him stay clean, and once he picked up a paddle there was no looking back. He began competing at the Games in 2002 and has excelled at the sport ever since.

Now he believes that table tennis was his lifeline. It has become a positive focal point in his life, and both he and his family are proud of his efforts at the Games. In 1998, he volunteered to work at the event when it was held in Leesburg, Va. It was there that he realized that table tennis was a popular competitive sport among veterans. At the time, he was not eligible to play since he was not of age. He had an epiphany at the event, and after it was over he made a promise that, "if God let me live (to play), I would win."

A former infantry sergeant and squad leader in Vietnam from 1967-1968, Hugee is a disabled veteran from Falling Waters, W.Va., who receives care at the VA Medical Center in Martinsburg. Hugee speaks highly of his care there. "They have the red carpet out for veterans," he said. "They are 100 percent behind the veterans and I have nothing but high praises for them."

When you see the masterful Robert Hugee at the 22nd National Veterans Golden Age Games in Indianapolis, Ind., you're more than likely to see the glow of his table tennis paddle from this man with the Midas touch!

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