



Midnight Sun

A Daily Publication of the 26th National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Issue 5

Friday, July 7, 2006

Meet a Few of Our 'Rookies'

One of the most appealing aspects of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games is the diversity of the athletes who compete—in age, experience and abilities. While there are literally hundreds of “veteran” competitors, the first-time or newly injured participants garner special attention. Some 130 novice athletes are at the Games this week. Of those, more than 30 recently returned from serving our nation in Iraq, Afghanistan and other locations overseas. Here are just a few.

Alan “Doc” Babin of Round Rock, Texas, served with the U.S. Army’s 82nd Airborne Division as a medic. Shipped

to Iraq early in the war, he came to the aid of a fellow soldier who had been shot in the head. The enemy concentrated small arms fire on Babin, damaging 90 percent of his stomach. While he recuperated at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington,

D.C., he contracted meningitis and then had a stroke that left him paralyzed. He’s undergone 70 surgeries.

This week, Babin is competing in bowling, shot put, weightlifting and quad rugby. Next year, he plans to participate in even more events. When Alan Babin says “never give up,” he means it.

Tyler Hall of Wasilla, Alaska, enlisted in the U.S. Army exactly two years before the terrorist attacks

of Sept. 11, 2001. He went to Iraq soon after. While there, an improvised explosive device exploded beneath a vehicle in which he was riding, and doctors had to amputate his left leg below the knee.

Hall has made a successful transition to using his prosthesis, but does use a wheelchair to compete in certain sports. Although he has attended the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, this is his first time at the Games. As an Alaskan, he hopes others are enjoying his home state. “I hope everybody has gotten to do some fishing and some sightseeing, too,” he said.



Tyler Hall (left), of Wasilla, Alaska, and Roberto Cruz (above), of Tampa, Fla., are two of the novice athletes competing this year who were wounded in Iraq.

Jeff Snover, 39, is another novice this week. With more than 18 years of service to his country, he had tours in Korea, Iraq and other locations. The former U.S. Army chief warrant officer returned home to Georgia without a scratch after serving in Iraq. Only **continued on page 3**

Today's Weather

Showers likely; high 67 degrees, low 55 degrees; 40 percent chance of rain.



Schedule of Events for Today

6-8:30 a.m.	Breakfast	Hotels
9 a.m.	Archery	Bartlett High School
	Slalom II, III	Bartlett High School
12-2 p.m.	Lunch	Box Lunch
2 p.m.	Swimming	Bartlett High School
2:30 p.m.	Weightlifting	Egan Convention Center
5:30-7:30 p.m.	Dinner	Egan Convention Center
7:30 p.m.	Basketball Consolation Game	Sullivan Arena
	Power Soccer Championship Game	Sullivan Arena
9 p.m.	Basketball Championship Game	Sullivan Arena
	Quad Rugby Championship Game	Sullivan Arena

Awards Presentation Schedule

As always, medals are being awarded two ways. For sports events with a clear winner, medals are awarded at the venue immediately after the event. Remaining events include: slalom Super G, power soccer, quad rugby, weightlifting, basketball and softball. If you are unable to accept your immediate award after the event, they will be available at the next scheduled awards time at the Egan Center, or for pick-up prior to the Closing Ceremonies.

If results must be tabulated, medals are delayed. They will be presented at the awards table in the Egan Center during the following times:

Track & Field: today, 4:30–8 p.m.

Archery & Swimming: Saturday, 11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Motor Rally: Saturday, 4–7 p.m. **at Sullivan Arena**

Award photos are being taken and printed right at the awards area (one per athlete). Results are being posted on bulletin boards in the Egan Center lobby. Please pick up your medals promptly to avoid a long line the last day.

Kids Day at the Wheelchair Games

Kids Day was held yesterday at Bartlett High School, where several of our competing athletes played another role at the Games—serving as Kids Day mentors.

At the event, more than 20 Kids Day mentors took time out of their Games schedules to share a day with local children with disabilities from Anchorage, to introduce them to the wonderful world of adaptive sports.

The day kicked off with the athletes discussing the benefits of getting involved in adaptive sports and recreation. Putting their best

military voices forward, mentor Holly Koester led the other athletes and children in singing military cadence songs. Then, the group moved on to warm-up exercises to prepare the children for their events in t-ball, slalom and relay races.

The mentors know that being involved in sports and recreational activities is good for the mind, body and spirit and builds not only strength and coordination, but also confidence. Athlete Ken Force believes that being a mentor is a worthwhile endeavor and loves to **continued on page 7**

On the Menu ...



Breakfast (6-8:30 a.m. at hotels): Menus vary by location.

Lunch (12-2 p.m. at Bartlett High School and Egan Convention Center): Box lunch with roasted chicken wrap, potato salad, orange and oatmeal cookie; assorted beverages.

Dinner (5:30-7:30 p.m. at Egan Convention Center): Florentine salad; shrimp scampi; apple-almond stuffed chicken thigh; asparagus; hedgehog cake; assorted beverages.

**Note: Some menu items may be subject to change at the chef's discretion.*

Video clips

Did you see a local TV news story about the Games that you'd like to have a copy of? Contact Quality Services at (907) 274-1056 to purchase a DVD or VHS copy of Alaska television news coverage of the Games. The cost is \$30 per story for a DVD or \$25 per story for a VHS format tape, plus mailing costs.

Wheelchair Slalom: Pushing Competitors Past the Norm

Whether you have already tried the slalom event on Wednesday or will be giving it a try at Bartlett High School tomorrow, you know the challenge and the commitment it takes to stay the course at this event. Unlike most other competitive events, there is no able-bodied equivalent to the slalom, making it a true “wheelchairs only” sport.

Slalom course creator Jim Hayes sums up the underlying philosophy of the slalom events this way: “They are designed to push the individual beyond what they normally do, so that in life, they can do it more normally.” Hayes has been pushing beyond the norm at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for more than 20 years. His leadership and innovation has made the slalom one of the signature events of Games.

Hayes has coached the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) intercollegiate wheelchair basketball team to seven national championships over 30 years. Back in the 1980s, he had seen the slalom as a part of the National Wheelchair Athletic Association events and the Paralympics. But slalom in those settings was pretty tame. “It was just a course with cones and you had to zigzag around them,” Hayes said.

He began making the course at UTA more challenging and soon athletes were coming to train at



Slalom course creator Jim Hayes goes over the event rules with competitors on Wednesday.

UTA for the event. National Director Tom Brown decided to bring Hayes to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games to bring that type of challenge to the veteran athletes.

Wonder where the ideas come from to make the event so physically and mentally demanding? With tongue planted firmly in cheek, Hayes admitted what many have long suspected: that when he has a nightmare, he writes it down and incorporates it into the event. Whatever the source of the ideas for the **continued on page 7**

‘Rookies’ cont.

three months after coming home, however, a tree he was cutting fell on him, causing spinal cord injuries.

Snover, a paraplegic who lives in Evans, Ga., has set his sights on table tennis, shot put, weightlifting and softball. To get ready, Snover trained five hours per week with a personal trainer. “Prior to my injury, I used to love to play golf and run, but now I have been introduced to so many great wheelchair sports and I plan to become competitive again,” he said.

Roberto Cruz is a 24-year-old active duty Army soldier from Tampa, Fla., injured after being shot by a sniper in Tikrit on August 14, 2005. “I’ve looked forward to meeting fellow veterans at the Games and being active again in sports,” Cruz said. He is competing as a paraplegic and, because of his injuries, is taking on the added challenge of competing right-handed in bowling, air guns and three field events. “After my injury, I never thought I would be able to compete in sports again,” he said. “I have always been physically active and I know there is a future out there for me—in sports and in life.”

Many of the Iraqi and Enduring Freedom veterans share the desire to get back into the game. One is John

Bennett, 34, of Cascade, Mont., also hit by a sniper in Iraq. “I enjoyed playing sports before I was injured and have been curious about how I will do now,” he said.

Robert Delaney, 22, of Chula Vista, Calif., was just injured in December. “I am a very competitive person and sports have always been a big part of my life,” he said. “This is an incredible experience.” Delaney hopes to use his “mad wheelchair skills” around the slalom course while he’s here.

Matthew Cole of Covington, Ga., is another combat-wounded veteran who served in Iraq. “Athletic competition is a great thing for anyone, but for disabled people it is a boost to their confidence,” he said. “To be able to compete is very fulfilling. This is the first of many Games for me.”

These novice athletes (and around 100 others) represent the future of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Their courage and determination complement and enhance what their more experienced comrades have come to know as the competitive spirit and outstanding camaraderie that make this event so special. To *all* of our first-timers we say, “Hope you’ve had fun at the Games!”

What's Where?

Durable Medical Equipment (DME) is located at the Marriott Hotel in the Skagway Room; the Sheraton Anchorage Hotel in the Kuskokwim Room; and the Howard Johnson Hotel in the Anchorage Room. DME will be open today from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. It will be open tomorrow at 12 a.m. through 12 a.m. Sunday for athletes departing their hotels. In addition to the Marriott, Sheraton and Howard Johnson hotels, DME turn-in will also be available at the Clarion Suites in the Glacier Room; Homewood Suites in the Yukon Room; Hilton Garden Inn in the Tlingit Room; and the Hawthorne Suites in Ballroom B. The phone number for DME is (907) 382-2934 or (907) 382-2942.

Hospitality

Hospitality desks are located in each hotel lobby and at the Egan Convention Center through Sunday. Hours are 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. A wealth of information is available at each of these desks, such as recommended restaurants and places to shop, things to do in Anchorage, maps with driving directions, the Games schedule, transportation schedule, departure information and extra luggage tags, lost luggage forms, Spirit of the Games Award ballots, and optional tour information.

Internet Café

You are far from home and just won a medal—how do you let your friends back home know? Come to the Internet Café and send them a message, of course! The Internet Café is located in the lobby of the Egan Convention Center. Café hours are 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Computers and printers are available, compliments of longtime Games sponsor Hewlett-Packard. Staff are available to help with questions. Also, be sure to tell your friends and family back home about the Games Web site. Results, news releases and photos will be posted starting mid-week, at www.wheelchairgames.org.

Medical Emergencies and Assistance

Full medical suites are available only at the following hotels: Marriott, Sheraton Anchorage and Howard Johnson. These medical suites will be fully operational through Saturday, ending at 10:30 p.m. The medical suites will be open for athletes each day from 7 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. for treatment of injuries and illnesses. If you have a medical emergency after the medical suites are closed, contact the operator at the hotel where you are staying. That operator will take the athlete's name and room number and communicate with the physician or nurse on call. **Do not call 911 unless there is a life-threatening emergency!** If this occurs, please have the hotel operator contact 911. **All other hotels will have nurses on duty after hours only.** It is the same procedure for contacting the hotel operator for medical emergencies after 10:30 p.m. If medical issues arise during the day, athletes need to go to the medical suites at the Marriott, Sheraton or Howard Johnson, or be evaluated at the various venue sites where medical teams are also stationed. The medical staff are easily identified by their red shirts with a white cross on the back. Only registered athletes or volunteers on duty will be treated by VA medical staff in the hotels or at the venues. If family members need medical assistance, a list of local emergency clinics and hospitals is available at the hospitality desks.

Wheelchair Repair

Wheelchair repair is available through Sunday, for emergencies only. The main wheelchair repair station is located at the Marriott Hotel. Invacare personnel are also available at most sports venues for emergency repairs. Contact the hospitality desk at your hotel for specific locations or for after-hours emergencies. The hospitality desks are open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily.

Special Notice

Paralympic quad rugby player Mark Zupan, star of the movie "Murderball," will be guest announcer at the quad rugby finals tonight at 9 p.m. at Sullivan Arena. Stop by to see him!

Transportation

Hotel Transportation to Main Transport HUB

There are three main transportation loops from the hotels to the Egan Center, which is the main transportation hub. All hotel buses go to the Egan Center. **You must transfer at the Egan Center** to be transported to your event venue.

Red Loop – hotels located on the east side of downtown, which include:

- Sheraton Anchorage Hotel
- Clarion Suites Hotel
- Howard Johnson
- Aspen Hotel (must push to the Clarion to pick up transportation)

White Loop – hotels located on the west side of downtown:

- Hawthorne Suites Hotel
- Marriott Hotel

Blue Loop – hotels located in midtown:

- Hilton Garden Inn
- Homewood Suites
- Motel 6
- Fairfield Inn



To & From Sports Venues

Transportation departs from the Egan Center starting **one hour** prior to game time. Please plan ahead when departing from your hotel to the Egan Center. Athletes need to be at their respective sports venues at least a half-hour before start time. It is **strongly recommended** that you depart from your hotel two hours prior to start time. If your sport is at the Egan Center (weightlifting, table tennis or air guns) you only need to depart from your hotel one hour before. Remember, when departing from your hotel you will be taken to the Egan Center where you will transfer to another bus that will take you to your event. For Closing Ceremonies you will be taken directly from your hotel to Sullivan Arena.

Bus Loading

All hotel buses are loading on E Street between 5th and 6th Avenues. All buses going to events are being loaded on E Street between 4th and 5th Avenues.

Egan Center distances from hotels:

Sheraton Anchorage Hotel – 7 blocks

Clarion Suites Hotel – 3 blocks

Howard Johnson – 2 blocks

Hawthorne Suites Hotel – 9 blocks

Marriott Hotel – 5 blocks

Aspen – 7 blocks (no transportation is available from this hotel. You must push to the Clarion (2 blocks) for transportation.

Hilton – 2 blocks (no transportation is available from this hotel. You must push to the Egan Center for transportation.

Hilton Garden Inn – 2 miles (not pushable)

Homewood Suites – 2 miles (not pushable)

Motel 6 – 2 miles (not pushable)

Fairfield Inn – 2 miles (not pushable)

Departure Information



Luggage

You should have received five departure luggage tags during the Expo on Monday. These tags **MUST** be attached to your luggage or they will not be accepted for delivery from your hotel to the airport. You may call the bell captain to bring your luggage to the hotel luggage room OR you may bring it down yourself. Bags **MUST** be brought to the luggage room at least four hours prior to departure. Your bags will be delivered from the hotel to the Games baggage area located next to the hospitality desk at the airport just inside the transportation drop-off area. Volunteers will assist you in getting your bags from the Games baggage area to your airline check-in area.

Departure Transportation

Saturday: For those who are leaving after the Closing Ceremonies on any of the 12–2:30 a.m. flights, direct transportation from the Sullivan Arena to the airport will begin at 10 p.m. Transportation from the hotels to the airport will be available; however, you will still need to have your bags in the hotel luggage room at least four hours prior to your flight departure.

Sunday: If departing from your hotel, please plan to leave the hotel three hours prior to your flight departure. Departures will begin at 3 a.m. and will run continuously through midnight.

After midnight Sunday: Individuals departing anytime after July 9 must arrange their own transportation to the airport.

Elite Competition: Taking Your Game to a Whole New Level

Elite competition is right around the corner, if you prepare. The preparation is something that Paralympic champion John Register knows a lot about. Register, who is the director of Paralympic sport development, is at the Games this week, in part to encourage wheelchair athletes to take their game to a different level. He will be on site until tonight and can be reached at (719) 439-2260.

Preparation is just one step to establish, meet and exceed your goals. Here are some more.

First, get involved at your local sports organizations or clubs such as the YMCA, gym, local cycling groups, track and field clubs, or basketball teams. Don't limit yourself to disabled sports.

Next, get in touch with the U.S. Paralympics with your identified sport. Register discourages coming in with multiple sports. Choose the sport in which you are the best competitively. The U.S. Paralympics will ensure that the first step is one in which they can assure the right coach, training facility and contact information so that you may receive nearby opportunities for competition.

Specific sports have unique classifications, so the classification you have for the National Veterans Wheelchair Games will not be the same for the Paralympics. You should know the benchmarks and standards for the specific sport. For more information, visit the Web site at www.usparalympics.org.

The third step is to train. Paralympic coaches will help with daily progress, diet and lifestyle changes. They can help with identification of a nutritionist and other lifestyle issues that might be barriers to promoting good health for a true athlete. In addition, the assigned coach will be able to monitor and track your progress and ensure that your progression will maximize your potential in making the national and then the international team.

The most critical points for athletes who want to take their game to the next level are continuous local training and getting into a club. "That's where it all begins," said Register. Are you ready?

Slalom cont.

obstacles, Hayes continues to demonstrate every course before the athletes compete. As an athlete with a Class IC injury himself, he never creates a course that cannot be conquered.

Long-time participants and first-timers alike find the slalom to be a great event, a favorite for athletes and spectators. But the event carries benefits into the athletes' personal lives as well. Hayes tells the athletes, "If you can overcome the obstacles of the slalom, you can get on an airplane and see the world, or you can get into your fishing boat and go fishing. Using a wheelchair in an imperfect world is about overcoming obstacles."

Among Hayes' favorite memories are the 1991 Games in Miami. As he was setting up the Class II-III course, a young novice athlete came by, accompanied by her twin sister and trainer. "Wow," she said, "so this is what I signed up for. I need to go cancel."

Hayes and the young woman talked. They went outside and he taught her to go down stairs backwards, an essential skill for the event. The athlete decided to compete. She struggled throughout the course, but when she finished, those who were present gave her a 10-minute ovation. Five years later, that athlete, Holly Koester, from Walton Hills, Ohio, was selected as the Spirit of the Games winner. She still competes in slalom and gave it another go at Bartlett this week.

The slalom *Super G*, open to the top three finishers in Classes II-V and sometimes to other athletes by invitation, is a compelling event for spectators. Hayes describes the magic that surrounds the event this way: "Somewhere during the course, the wheelchair disappears. It becomes just the athlete, meeting and overcoming obstacles."

Ask Dr. Dan



Dear Dr. Dan,

I have been having some skin irritation around my prosthesis. What is a quick fix so I can keep competing this week in the Games?

Irritable in Alaska

Dear Irritable,

Additional perspiration has long been believed to be a contributing factor to amputee skin problems. Incidence of skin problems increases dramatically during the summer months, as opposed to the winter months when it's cooler.

Kids Day cont.

share his experiences. "By instilling a dedicated spirit in each child to challenge themselves, each mentor plants a seed within that child's soul, so that they will be stronger, both physically and emotionally, to pursue and conquer the challenges that they face in their daily lives."

The day was not just about fun and games, though. It was also a day where our veteran athletes could share their accomplishments and focus on abilities and not disabilities, instilling a sense of pride and accomplishment in the children. Kids Day is an opportunity to enhance the lives of children, today and in the future.

The participating veterans also know the importance and responsibility of giving back to the community. Tricia Wilson-Sapp wants to educate the parents, siblings and the community to let them know that no one has to sit on the sidelines and everyone can enjoy sports. "At Kids Day, we have the chance to introduce them to things they never thought they

One simple way to keep irritation to a minimum while competing is to be sure your skin is completely dry before donning your prosthesis. Powders and deodorants often leave a residue on the skin that can become a skin irritant within the closed environment of the liner of your prosthetic device.

If you use a sheath between the skin and the liner of your prosthesis, there is no direct skin contact and a small amount of air is allowed to circulate around the residual limb. A sheath also serves to keep sweat away from the skin, which also could lead to irritation.

Lastly, give yourself a rest. If you can remove the prosthesis for an hour or so in the middle of the day, the skin can breathe. **-Dr. Dan**

could do ... we play sports with them and get them so excited, and our excitement matches theirs," she said.

For some of the children, it was their first time participating in sports and they appreciated the opportunity to learn from the athletes, who offered words of encouragement and shared tips to make it easier for them to compete.

The day's events concluded with an award ceremony where every child received a medal for participating. "I thrive on witnessing the look on a child's face when he or she accomplishes something positive," said Force. "And at the end of the day, when you see the smiles on the kids' faces you just know the day was a success."

Kids Day was a special day for the kids and the veterans alike, offering a day of fun and life lessons they could all cherish.

Check out the Games on the Internet at www.wheelchairgames.org.



Reaching Out ...



*...Pushing
Hard*

