

# National Veterans Wheelchair Games



## Athlete Profile (National)

### Eugene Gold – The Golden Arrow

Eugene Gold is a legend at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Since 1986, the year he began participating in the Games, this 57-year-old United States Army veteran from Hawaii has dominated the archery competition, taking home the gold medal 17 years in a row.

His passion for archery began when he was six years old. In 1974, when a hit-and-run accident left him a paraplegic, some thought he would have to put down his bow and arrow. Gold knew better. Despite having to use a wheelchair to get around, this combat veteran of Vietnam fought to once again master the sport he always loved.

In addition to competing himself, Gold now teaches archery to young children at a summer camp in Waiialua, on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. "The Wheelchair Games are a very big event for me," Gold said this year. "The competition makes you do your best in everyday life, and staying healthy is very important. I've competed for 24 years in various competitions, and always look forward to seeing old friends and making new ones."

Although archery is his passion, Gold also competes in several other sports including table tennis and 9-ball. At the 2002 Games in Cleveland, he maintained his first-place status in archery, while winning a silver in table tennis, and a bronze in 9-ball. "That was my 16<sup>th</sup> year attending the Games and it keeps getting better each time," said Gold, who won another gold in archery and silver in table tennis in 2003. "The competition keeps me coming back, although it is also wonderful to see old friends and make new ones." That is something not hard for Gold to do, since he passes out macadamia nuts to everyone he encounters at the event each year. Although he missed the event in 2004, he was back in action in 2005, bringing home his 18<sup>th</sup> gold medal from the Games, along with another silver in table tennis.

Gold first became involved in wheelchair sports five years after he was injured, when he joined a group of local wheelchair athletes who played basketball, table tennis, and swam together. He's been a fixture at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games since 1987. "Competing in wheelchair sports keeps me healthy," said Gold. "You have to stay fit in order to succeed." He believes that sports competition is therapeutic, especially for the veterans who participate in the Games. "It takes you beyond just pushing yourself around. At the Games, the officials and volunteers support and encourage the athletes one hundred percent. They really take care of us, pushing us to exceed our own expectations. Everyone should experience this."

Despite the long excursion from Hawaii to the various Games locations each year, Gold continues to make the trip and encourages others to watch the events. "People should come to the Games as spectators, especially if they have never seen a large wheelchair sports competition before. It's just amazing. It will blow their minds."

Gold is always an easy competitor to spot – just look for the one wearing the Maui shirt and distributing macadamia nuts. He should especially stand out his year in Alaska!