

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Jim Milliken – Competition is the Key!



Jim Milliken, a 59-year-old Army veteran from South Bend, Ind. says, “It’s definitely the competition that got me hooked on the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. I always look forward to coming to this event because of the large number of athletes and the tremendous spirit you feel being a competitor here.”

While serving in Vietnam, Milliken was out on patrol when a huge explosion went off behind him. Along with Milliken, two of his fellow soldiers were also severely injured. He was rushed to surgery immediately, where doctors amputated both his right leg above the knee and his left leg below the knee.

Despite such serious physical and emotional injuries, Milliken attributes wheelchair sports to his active lifestyle since his injury in Vietnam. “I have been competing in wheelchair sports for 29 years,” he says. “After my injury, it was wheelchair sports that got me out and active again. It made a big difference in my rehabilitation and my life in general.”

Although winning is not the primary goal for every athlete competing in these Games, Milliken has certainly enjoyed his share of fame. He took home four gold medals in swimming at the 2005 Games and plans to take home more this year. In fact, Milliken was selected to be a part of the 1988 Paralympic swim team in Seoul, Korea. “Winning doesn’t mean that I always beat all my competitors,” he said. “It sometimes means I beat my personal best swim times. If I beat the timing goals I set but someone else wins the race, then I’m still happy with myself!”

This will be Milliken’s 14th year competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and he is quick to recognize the event for all of its benefits in addition to the athletic ones. “It’s more fun to participate in events when it’s all veterans who went through the same thing together. Now, I enjoy cheering on the younger guys and giving them advice about competing.”