



## History of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games are an outgrowth of the Department of Veterans Affairs' historic involvement in wheelchair sports. Wheelchair sports had their beginning in the aftermath of World War II, when young disabled veterans began playing wheelchair basketball in VA hospitals throughout the United States. Interest in wheelchair basketball soon spread to other sports such as track and field, bowling, swimming, and archery, spawning the formation of several associations devoted to new and innovative wheelchair sports.

While the participation of paralyzed and other disabled veterans continued to flourish during the intervening years, it was not until 1980, when VA established a Recreation Therapy Service, that VA's efforts brought about an enhanced awareness of the rehabilitative value of wheelchair athletics. Since then, VA therapists have used wheelchair sports as a therapeutic tool for treating disabled veterans.

The first National Veterans Wheelchair Games were held in 1981, the "International Year of Disabled Persons," at the VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va. That year, 74 veterans from 14 states competed in sports ranging from table tennis and billiards, to swimming and weightlifting. Those first Games established an enduring trait that has characterized the event ever since — a strong sense of common identity and camaraderie among the participants. The hundreds of veterans who choose to compete in the Games each year demonstrate their continuing popularity.

By 1985, the growing size, complexity, and resources needed for the Games presented a daunting challenge to VA medical centers hosting the program. Recognizing that most of the athletes were paralyzed veterans, the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) offered to become a co-sponsor. To help obtain resources needed to host this national event, PVA recruited corporations to join in support of the Games. Since 1985, PVA's corporate sponsor program has helped the Games grow, both in number of competitors as well as variety of sports offered.

In 1987, 12 British military veterans were invited to participate in the Games and a team from Great Britain has come every year since. After that first year, the British athletes formed a new disabled sports group — The British Ex-Services Wheelchair Sports Association. This group extended the philosophy behind the National Veterans Wheelchair Games to the rest of the world, hosting International Veterans Wheelchair Games in Great Britain in 1994, 1996, and 1999.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games represent the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world. In 2008, 497 wheelchair athletes came from 45 states, Puerto Rico, and Great Britain to compete at the Games in Omaha, Nebraska. The 2009 Games will be held in Spokane, Washington July 13-18, hosted by the Spokane VA Medical Center and the Northwest Chapter of PVA. Both VA and PVA are committed to the rehabilitation of disabled veterans through these Games, and will continue their efforts to make the National Veterans Wheelchair Games more challenging and rewarding every year.

# National Veterans Wheelchair Games



## Athletes Competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, 1981- 2008

<b>Year</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of Athletes</b>
1981	Richmond, Virginia	74
1982	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	137
1983	Long Beach, California	178
1984	Brockton, Massachusetts	272
1985	College Park, Maryland	280
1986	Dallas, Texas	360
1987	Ann Arbor, Michigan	389
1988	San Antonio, Texas	460
1989	Long Beach, California	397
1990	New Orleans, Louisiana	550
1991	Miami, Florida	487
1992	Dayton, Ohio	492
1993	San Antonio, Texas	454
1994	Kansas City, Missouri	473
1995	Atlanta, Georgia	519
1996	Seattle, Washington	487
1997	San Diego, California	577
1998	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	539
1999	San Juan, Puerto Rico	555
2000	San Antonio, Texas	587
2001	New York, New York	523
2002	Cleveland, Ohio	484
2003	Long Beach, California	540
2004	St. Louis, Missouri	518
2005	Minneapolis, Minnesota	498
2006	Anchorage, Alaska	527
2007	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	513
2008	Omaha, Nebraska	497
2009	Spokane, Washington	???