

## Athlete Profile (National)

### Carlos Leon – A Great Achiever

Don't let his charming smile and friendly demeanor mislead you. When it's time for competition, Carlos Leon is all business. Leon, 24, has set two world records in discus at the U.S. National Track and Field Championships and the Paralympic Team Trials and earned a slew of gold medals at other national and local sports events. This Marine Corps veteran of the War in Iraq earned a spot on the 2008 U.S. Paralympic Team that travelled to China; won two medals at the 2007 Parapan American Games in Rio; and competed in the 2007 Canadian Track and Field Championship in Windsor. In addition, he continues to be a top contender at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, competing as a quadriplegic. Leon, who lives in North Lauderdale, Fla., excels in track and field events, but also enjoys other sports such as quad rugby, slalom and basketball. In fact, he has been a member of the Miami HEAT Wheels basketball team since 2005 and continues to challenge himself in new sports.



"I'm not going to paint the picture all nice and pretty because there's really nothing pretty about being paralyzed," Leon said. "But you've got to keep going and live your life. Yes, I'm a quad, but I am not going to let that word define me."

Leon's spinal cord injury, which resulted from a diving accident in Hawaii, has not changed his enthusiasm for being a go-getter and he encourages other veterans with injuries to stay active. "A lot of times veterans come home and forget to get involved in their communities. I would like to tell them not to be afraid to get out and try something new."

Featured on a CNN.com blog called, "Young People Who Rock," Leon proves to be inspirational to young people everywhere. On the Web site he is described as, "full of soul and spunk, even while he's doing his serious training." Leon was named as one of the wheelchair athletes to represent the Hilton Family of Hotels as a "Be Hospitable Ambassador" in 2008. According to a press release by the Hilton Family, the athletes selected as ambassadors are chosen for their abilities to "instill a global appreciation of graciousness, respect and thoughtfulness among others."

Based on his many achievements, it is obvious that Carlos Leon is a great athlete. Judging by the words used to describe him, it is just as apparent he is a wonderful role model as well.