

# National Veterans Wheelchair Games



## Athlete Profile (National)

### Holly Koester Zooms to Victory in all 50 States

There is no holding Holly Koester back. Amazing and inspirational, this school teacher brings her lessons outside of the classroom as she constantly pushes herself to greater feats. In 2008, she became the first wheelchair racer to complete a marathon in all 50 states. In addition to that triumph, this 49-year-old Army veteran from Walton Hills, Ohio, hasn't missed a year of competing at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games since her first one in 1991, and she is returning once again to the Games this July in Spokane, Washington.

"When I was first injured, I thought my active life was over," Koester says. "After discovering wheelchair sports, I realized that this is clearly about as far from the truth as can be imagined."

When Koester mustered the courage to participate in her first wheelchair sports event in 1991, it was only a year after she was injured while on alert at the Redstone Arsenal in northern Alabama. She was driving on the post when her vehicle overturned and caused severe injuries. Discharged from the Army several months later, Koester faced returning to civilian life, with all of its challenges, as a paraplegic. Koester quickly learned to adapt and regained her self-esteem. She attributes her positive attitude and active lifestyle to the benefits of wheelchair sports. "Racing in my chair helps keeps me motivated and focused on staying healthy and happy," she says.

Koester's enthusiasm is unbridled. "This event has literally changed my life and my family's life," she says. "Being a part of 500 people in wheelchairs is an absolutely great time. I am so grateful I can be a part of this." One of her favorite events is the slalom competition, a challenging obstacle course that tests the athlete's agility, speed and strength. Koester explains, "There are obstacles on the course that people in wheelchairs face every day. I love the challenge of this timed event, and being able to cheer on the other participants. I would also really like to encourage more women to compete in wheelchair racing," she says.

In addition to her strong athletic drive, Koester also is very active in her community, both as the sports director for the Paralyzed Veterans of America Buckeye Chapter and also as a substitute teacher in her local public school system. "It is important for me to give back to my community in a way that will educate others about the challenges and opportunities those of us in wheelchairs experience." Last year, Koester was one of 12 veteran athletes chosen to be featured on boxes of Cheerios, in an effort to support military veterans and their families.

