

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Joe Velasquez – A Competitor with Heart

His real first name is Philemon, but most people know him as “Rollin’ Joe.” Regardless of the moniker, Joe Velasquez is probably one of the kindest men you’ll ever hope to meet.

A long-time participant in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, Velasquez competes in several different sports but can just as likely be seen on the sidelines cheering along his fellow athletes. At the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games, Velasquez, 60, was honored with the annual “Spirit of the Games” award, a testament to his athletic prowess as well as the sportsmanship he displays to the others. “I was overwhelmed with emotion and shock,” Velasquez said of the recognition. “My emotions ran amuck and I was brought to tears.”

A nagging shoulder injury may keep Velasquez from competing in his favorite event this year, the wheelchair slalom, but that won’t keep him from his role as unofficial cheerleader. “It’s a big loss in my heart not to compete in the slalom,” he laments. “I’ll still be there cheering on the others though.” Velasquez knows better than anyone what a challenge the timed obstacle course can be and how much the sounds of voices roaring from the sidelines can help any competitor struggling to complete the course.

Velasquez joined the Navy in 1970 and served for almost 14 years before being medically discharged. His dedication to helping others continues as a member of nine different veterans’ service organizations.

Family is also very important to Velasquez. This year, he will move with his wife, Teresa, from their home in Turlock, California, to the state of Washington so they can be closer to three of their four children. “Family comes first,” he said. An added benefit is that the move will also bring him closer to the location for this year’s National Veterans Wheelchair Games, taking place in July in Spokane.

With his well known relaxed demeanor and soothing voice, Velasquez ponders his place in life and settles on a simple notion. “Reality is what it is,” he says. “I look forward to every day.”

Although Velasquez definitely has a big heart, he is still a fierce competitor. “I don’t go to lose,” he said with a chuckle. “I am the epitome of the competitor.” His performance at the 2008 Games reiterates his desire to win. Velasquez won four gold medals in all four events he entered, including nine-ball, shot-put, bowling and table tennis. His philosophy on the human passion to win is simple. “Competing and winning inspires us all to stay healthy.”

