

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Scott Winkler – Helping Others is His Success

Scott Winkler, a 36-year-old Army veteran from Grovetown, Ga., is returning to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for his third year, after earning gold medals in three of the four events he entered in 2008. Winkler also earned a spot on the 2008 U.S. Paralympic Team, the Olympic equivalent for world class athletes with disabilities, and traveled to Beijing, China last September where he not only placed fifth out of 17 competitors in the shot put, he broke the American record in the F55 Class. Winkler's trip to Beijing left him almost speechless. "Oh, it was just being amongst the 4000 athletes from all the different countries," he says. "It's the greatest feeling in the world."



In 1994, Winkler joined the Army at age 21. After taking a break from military life, he decided to rejoin. In March 2003, just as the U.S. entered Iraq, he was sent to Tikrit, where he worked as a driver transporting everything from people to ammunition. Just two months later, he fell off the truck and injured his spinal cord. Shortly thereafter, Winkler began extensive rehabilitation and was even able to walk. Later, however, doctors found lesions on his spine. He woke up from extensive surgery paralyzed from the chest down.

Winkler is co-founder of a nonprofit organization, "Champions Made from Adversity." Its mission is to advance the lives of physically disabled persons and their families through sports and leisure activities. He believes, "If you can believe – you can achieve. Getting out and trying new things is one of the absolute best things a disabled person can do. VA's approach to encouraging disabled veterans to participate in physical competitions drove my desire to create an organization that serves other physically disabled people in my community."

When it comes to the Wheelchair Games, his goals are simple. "I just like to go out and have fun," Winkler said. "I love to coach people in throwing and love to see their faces when they medal for the first time." Winkler is also looking forward to coaching a much younger group of athletes when he again participates in the Kid's Day event at the Wheelchair Games, which acquaints physically disabled children with wheelchair sports. "I loved doing the Kid's Day last year and can't wait to do it again in Spokane," he said.

Winkler continues his work with the southeastern chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America back home in Georgia. He volunteers at the VA Medical Center in Augusta, where he works with recreation therapists to help organize and take other disabled veterans on social outings and activities. He says, "VA recreation therapists gave me a lot of inspiration to get off the sidelines and back into the game. If I can help just one other veteran find the satisfaction of rediscovering an active life, I consider my work a success."