



SPECIAL EDITION

Saturday, July 8, 2006

Spirit of the Games Rooted in the Basics

The smell of burnt rubber assaulted the nostrils. Sweat, defiance and true grit seasoned the minds of spectators. The court simmered as the crowd cheered and each basket scored was a taste test for victory.

Charles Allen, athlete #581, pumped his chair as if his arms were made of steel at the 26th National Veterans Wheelchair Games basketball events. He stopped on a dime while anticipating every move of his challengers. His fast break left the competition scrambling and his prowess driving the ball down court heightened expectations. Taking a shot, he scored – and did it often. Tonight, this 34-year-old Army veteran from Cedar Hill, Texas, scores again as the 2006 Spirit of the Games Award winner.

At the Games in Anchorage, he wore number “1” on his orange jersey. One side of his chair is decorated with the “Army of One” logo, the other “HOOAH.” Clearly, he is proud of his military service, which included a three-year stint in Fairbanks, Alaska, at Fort Wainwright. The former infantryman was injured at 21 in a training accident at Fort Hood while serving with the cavalry scouts. He was introduced to wheelchair basketball while in rehab.

“It’s weird,” Allen said earlier this week. “I never played organized basketball before I was injured. I played football and ran track. I was pushing down the hall, going to an appointment at

the Dallas VA Medical Center when I saw some guys playing basketball. I didn’t really think much of it. They were just shooting around.” Allen decided then that he wanted to play basketball because he liked the way the local basketball players were able to handle themselves.



2006 Spirit of the Games recipient Charles Allen, of Cedar Hill, Texas.

These days, Allen moves with ease on the courts and he shares his motivation with newcomers to the Games. “When I talk to the new guys, I tell them to start with the basics,” he said. “To survive, you have to get active. It takes time, so be patient and don’t give up.”

“I was blessed that the Dallas area is really big on wheelchair basketball. I knew I had to get active in something.” In fact, Dallas is so big on wheelchair basketball they have a professional team – the Dallas Wheelchair Mavericks – of which Allen is a member. The Mavericks have won six National Wheelchair Basketball Association championships, including the past 2006 season. Allen said he really admired the skills of his Mavericks

teammates.

“I made making the team my goal,” said Allen. “I worked and worked hard, trained with Division 1 and 2 teams and finally made it two years ago.”

That’s Allen’s basic philosophy: Work hard for what you want. He practices three days a week and lifts weights in the off season. Wife Julie and

continued on page 4

Introducing the 2006 Rosenberg Award Winner: Todd Fringer



Todd Fringer competing in slalom.

Doctors gave Army veteran Todd Fringer a less than 1 percent chance of survival after a horrific car accident left him completely paralyzed. Only a little more than a year later, Fringer has not only made incredible strides in his recovery but has also won the 2006 Michael Rosenberg Award, allowing him to compete in his first National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

The award, a grant of up to \$1,000, is given each year to a deserving first-time athlete to use toward Games expenses. It was created by Robin L. Higgins, a former VA Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, to pay tribute to her grandfather, who was a disabled World War I veteran.

Fringer, 38, joined the Army in 1984 and worked as a cavalry scout for 13 years. He served two tours in Europe, fought in Operation Desert Storm, and graduated from airborne school before eventually joining the

National Guard in 1999 as a recruiter. On April 1, 2005, while driving with his niece and daughter, Fringer was hit at 55 mph by a drunk driver. When Fringer got out of the car, the other driver tried to flee the scene, but ended up running Fringer over and dragging him 25 feet. He suffered a traumatic brain injury, an ear laceration, broken ribs, collapsed lungs, a damaged spleen and spinal cord injuries, rendering him a quadriplegic.

Fringer's determined attitude is what prompted his nomination and eventual win of the award. "I never really asked why something like this happened to me," he said. "I just adapt and overcome." Fringer has undergone intense physical, recreational, vocational and speech therapy to get where he is today. Throughout his time at the VA medical facility in Milwaukee, he's been an inspiration to others recovering from all types of injuries and illnesses. "I try to

motivate people so they know they can do anything if they just put their mind to it," he said. "Their faith in me helps me progress in my own recovery."

Michelle Lanouette, a physical therapist at Milwaukee, nominated Fringer for the award. She has known him since his injury more than a year ago, and says his ability to connect with others despite his own severe injuries was the inspiration she needed to nominate someone for the very first time. "He was still so injured when he came into my office but seemed incredibly eager to reach out to other vets," said Lanouette. "Todd began his therapy very dependent on his caretakers but that didn't keep him from forming bonds with other veterans. He was able to inspire so many other patients."

Fringer was ecstatic after hearing the news of his win. "I'm just so proud to represent the essence of the Games through the Rosenberg Award," he said.



Minnesota veteran Robert Huber and his family really stood out from the crowd this week. They all wore "Team Papa/Team Bob" T-shirts to show their support. Huber competed in his ninth National Veterans Wheelchair Games this week, and was very proud to have his own private cheering section.

What are you doing next summer?

Come to the 'Great Games on a Great Lake' in 2007



The clock is counting down. Milwaukee employee Michael Torres explains to veteran Bob Brock the short time left before the 2007 Games come to Milwaukee (which is 344 as of today).

“Milwaukee is getting ready!” says Dean R. Martell, co-chair of the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The Milwaukee VA Medical Center and the Wisconsin Chapter of PVA have been working on the Games for a year already.

That’s right, a year. The local coordinating team was notified Milwaukee was chosen as the 2007 site in 2005 so they could attend the Games in Minneapolis. “We learned a lot in the Twin Cities,” said Martell, who is also attending this week’s event in Anchorage. “That will translate into our *Great Games on a Great Lake* in Milwaukee, June 19-23, 2007.” The lake, of course, is Lake Michigan and most events will be at the Midwest Airlines Center, located about a mile from that Great Lake.

“Any athlete coming here should expect to be treated like a king or queen. This is a town that is noted for its commitment to veterans and that legacy continues on today,” said Martell. He noted that commitment in the 10-story medical center building that

evolved from legislation signed by President Lincoln. That act created one of the first facilities to care for Civil War soldiers.

Milwaukee is not new to the Wheelchair Games, as the staff and community hosted about 60 athletes at the 2nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games in 1982. Twenty-five years later, more than 500 are expected to participate in the 2007 Milwaukee Games.

The site was again chosen as a host city in recognition of the staff’s long-standing tradition of care for spinal cord-injured veterans and the strong partnership that exists with the Wisconsin PVA Chapter. The spinal cord injury unit at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center was recognized as a Center of Excellence by VA in 1999 and again in 2002.

Games Reunite Comrades Wounded in Vietnam 38 Years Ago

Athlete Mike Little, of Loma Linda, Calif., was rounding the second corner of the handcycle race in downtown Anchorage when he



Davis

recognized a face in the crowd. The face was a little older – 38 years older, to be exact – but Little was sure it belonged to Tim “Mad Dog” Davis, a fellow Marine Corps veteran whom Little had fought alongside in Vietnam. The last time Little saw Davis was on May 13, 1968, when Davis was being flown away from Hill 55 in a helicopter after being seriously injured in Operation Allenbrook.

The men fought together just south of Da Nang in the Tet Offensive. After Davis was flown out, Little was shot seven times over the next week. He got a ticket home and has since settled in California. This is Little’s first year competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. While he is sure glad to be here in Anchorage, he is even happier to be reunited with Davis.

After being injured in Vietnam and becoming a double amputee, Davis, also of California and the 1994 Spirit winner, participated in the basketball, weightlifting, and track and field events at the Games. After getting a new titanium shoulder three years ago, he “switched sides” and became a Games official. While officiating at the handcycling race, a man

approached him at the finish line and called him by his nickname, Mad Dog. It was Little. Both men thought all these years that the other was dead. It was an emotional and joyous reunion.

Davis and 60 other veterans from the 3rd Battalion, 27th Marines have been meeting every two or three years in Gulf Shores, Ala. They have a reunion planned for June 2007. Needless to say, Davis is eager to tell everyone about seeing Little and that Little will be joining them next year.



Little

Thank You from the Public Affairs Team at the Games

From all of us who have been working in the media center this week, we thank you for allowing us the privilege of working with you during your stay in Anchorage. We appreciate your patience with our demands for quotes, interviews, photos, stories and database additions. Because of your willingness to share your experiences, not only with our team but also the Anchorage and national communities, we've had outstanding results this week!

Hometown News and Web

Our hometown news team prepared 376 individual news releases for those athletes requesting one. They also made hundreds of phone and e-mail contacts to local media across the country, letting them know about your participation in the 2006 Games. Their efforts have already resulted in lots of local media coverage with more to come in the next few weeks. All news releases are posted on the Games Web site by our Web team, who were busy adding event results and photos. Check it out at: www.wheelchairgames.org under "Athlete Information." *(If you did not consent to publicity, your names will not appear on the Web site; however, your results will be listed in the event results section by athlete number only.)*

Photography

Speaking of photos, our dedicated team of photographers, who came

from near and far this week, took more than 11,000 action photos of the athletes competing, and hundreds of other photos depicting activities and people. They were sized and modified by our Photoshop staff and volunteers, who worked from dawn till dusk (that's very early in the morning in Alaska!) to get the job done. The results are impressive, with more than 95 percent of athletes requesting a news release having a photo to go along with it.

Media Support

Members of our media support team were pitching the Games to local, national and international media long before the event began, and they've continued those efforts all week long. Because of their hard work, more than 500 confirmed media placements were recorded so far in newspapers, on TV and radio, and electronic Web media nationwide. In conjunction with the hometown news program, we expect to see many more articles and broadcasts appear over the next several weeks.

Newsletter

The Alaska public affairs team prepared five advance newsletters before the Games even began, and this week our newsletter team produced seven editions. We hope we have provided interesting reading and helpful information in the *Midnight Sun*, and that it has reached you each morning at all 10 hotels. Thank you so much for

sharing your inspiring stories with us. All editions of the *Midnight Sun* can be found on the Games Web site as well.

You have charmed us all this week in Anchorage, and we leave impressed, inspired and personally motivated to overcome the challenges we all face. We may be tired as we head for home, but we are grateful for a week of tremendous productivity and, at the same time, great fun. We will look forward to seeing you next year in Milwaukee. Safe travels home.

Your 2006 NVWG Public Affairs Team

Spirit of the Games cont.

daughter Charlesha support his efforts, and are not afraid to tell him when his game is not working.

"Wheelchair basketball is one of the ultimate exercises," he said. "It keeps you healthy and keeps your skin from breaking down by relieving the pressure points and toughening up different areas.

"Mentally, it is so uplifting. While I am playing, I forget all disabilities and problems. I am focused on winning the game."

Allen also focuses on other veterans. He made sure novice player Jonathan Pruden from Gainesville, Fla., was able to play on the Navy team Thursday night by loaning him his chair. Pruden, 28, is a combat-wounded veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"Life is not over because you got injured," said Allen. "It's like you are reborn with a whole new circle of friends. If you stay focused and on the right track, then it is not over. It's just beginning."

Goodbye from Anchorage LOC

It has been a privilege to have you here in Anchorage. Thank you for traveling such great distances to compete in the Last Frontier. You have brought smiles to so many faces with your energy, tenacity and playfulness. The community as a whole has embraced you as honored veterans and respected athletes. We wish you safe travels on your journey home or on your continued adventures through Alaska.