

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Glenn Fretz – Anything Is Possible If You Work Hard!



Glen Fretz, a 36-year-old Army veteran from Norman, Oklahoma, is attending the 26th National Veterans Wheelchair Games next month in Anchorage, Alaska. During his military service from 1990-94, Fretz was an Army mechanic, quality control specialist and evacuation specialist. A combat-injured veteran of the Gulf War, Fretz had several severe injuries at the end of his tour requiring that he now use a wheelchair. While on an evacuation mission, Fretz suffered a brain injury, neurological damage and spinal cord injuries resulting in paraplegia. Although he is unable to recount all the details of his accident because of his head injury, he does remember having reconstructive surgery on his right hand as well as hip and knee replacements after it happened.

Fretz first received care at the VA medical facility in San Diego, where he met a physical therapist who greatly improved his life. "I had an awesome physical therapist at the spinal cord injury unit in San Diego, who first got me involved in sports," he said. "Because of my therapist, I joined wheelchair basketball teams in California and then back home in Oklahoma."

Participating in wheelchair sports can be a tether back to reality for many injured veterans and for more than 500 courageous men and women, the National Veterans Wheelchair Games is a place to give it all they've got. Fretz has competed in the annual event since 1992. For the past two years, he returned home with gold medals in the wheelchair slalom competition, a challenging obstacle course that tests the competitors' skill, speed and strength, along with several others. "I like challenging myself to become better at the events I compete in," he says. "And I like competing against the friends I have made at the Games!"

Before he was injured, Fretz played basketball, football and golf. Years later and despite some daunting obstacles, he capitalizes on not only the therapeutic but the emotional value of the Wheelchair Games. "These Games are a building experience," he says. "They teach you that you only have the limits that you set for yourself. Anything is possible if you are willing to work hard."

Veterans have many reasons for attending such an active, competitive and therapeutic event, but for Glenn Fretz and many others, a major draw is the friendships that develop there. "Winning a medal at the Games is an extra blessing," he explained. "Getting to be a role model and encourage young veterans who have been injured is the main reason I am going."