



Athlete Profile (National)

John Bennett – Always Wanted to Visit

John Bennett always wanted to go to Alaska, but he never imagined he would be making the trip as a wheelchair athlete. In Anchorage this July, Bennett will do just that when he competes in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for the first time. Besides his wife Dena, he is also bringing along his four children to help lead his own personal cheering section. “My wife is looking forward to seeing how I do,” said Bennett. “Before I was injured, I was really competitive with sports.”

Bennett, who was 33 years old and a member of the Montana National Guard at the time, was shot by a sniper in February 2005 when on patrol in Iraq. He lost a kidney, spleen, colon, part of his pancreas and shattered two vertebrae and fractured another. He is now paralyzed from the waist down and is being followed in the spinal cord injury clinic at the VA Puget Sound Healthcare System in Seattle.

Bennett, who lives in Cascade, Montana, was in the National Guard for 14 years before his medical discharge. He was in mechanized infantry and also served in Bosnia. In his civilian job, he was a truck driver.

Before he was injured, Bennett played softball and was also in a pool league. Despite his injuries, he continues his love of competition and is signed up to compete in basketball, shot put, javelin, 100-meter track and bowling at the Games in Anchorage.

Bennett says that his upper body strength “has gotten a lot better,” and he considers himself ready to take on the challenge of the events. He knows the give-and-take of competition, and the National Veterans Wheelchair Games at Anchorage will not only test his newfound strength, but give him added confidence at the same time. John Bennett says that he looks forward to both.