

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

James Torres — A Spirited Athlete and Coach!



More than a decade ago at the 1995 Games in Atlanta, Ga., the committee that selects the annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games Spirit of the Games award recipient bestowed the award upon two athletes for the first time ever. James Torres, of Caguas, Puerto Rico, was one of them.

Torres, now 55, was a semi-pro baseball player in Puerto Rico before stepping on a booby trap in Vietnam while serving with the U.S. Army in 1969. Torres personifies the true meaning of being an athlete. Whether competing in field events, weightlifting, or playing table tennis, this veteran of a dozen National Veterans Wheelchair Games, two Paralympics, and two Pan American Games always gives his best. He consistently represents the spirit of these Games through his understanding of the importance of competition and his upbeat coaching philosophy.

Torres serves as President and National Director of the Puerto Rico Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA). When asked how these Games helped in his own rehabilitation, he attributes his participation with getting him involved in everything else. Since those initial Games, Torres has not only increased his own participation in sports, but has also coached almost every wheelchair sport, as well as the Puerto Rican Little League Baseball champions, and youth basketball.

Torres shares the good news of the Games with every newly injured veteran he encounters. "I tell them that they will see other people who are injured but who will prove that nothing is impossible," Torres said. "I let them know they can do anything because we train and prepare them."

Victor Ramirez, a recreation therapist at the San Juan VA Medical Center, has known Torres since 1988. In describing Torres, he said, "Even though he's the best wheelchair athlete in Puerto Rico, he shares with everyone else; he takes time to work with and coach the other athletes."

Torres cites his role as flagman for the Puerto Rican Paralympic Team in the 1988 Paralympics in Seoul, as one of his proudest moments. Even though he has reached the level of world-class competition, every year Torres still prepares for and looks forward to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. "I need to prepare myself for the competitors who want to beat me," said Torres, who has come away from Games each year with a wide array of medals to his credit. Having the Games held on his home turf of Puerto Rico in 1999 will always make that year's Games especially meaningful to him. "The Games offer a unique experience to all of the participants," said Torres. "We can show the world what can be accomplished when there is a will."