



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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By Anna Eisenberg  
Warrior Transition Command

## **“You may be wounded, ill or injured but you’re not defeated,” tandem cyclist says at U.S. Army Warrior Trials**

**West Point, New York** — Army, Air Force and Marines screamed each time retired Staff Sergeant Sean Johnson and Sergeant First Class Brian Mathis’ bike swung around the curve of the race route and back down out of sight. In those moments, uniform was insignificant. Injury was inconsequential. “Go Tandem!” chanted the crowd as Johnson and Sgt. 1st Class Mathis crossed the finish line. Johnson, the Army’s first 100 percent blind cyclist, completed the 2014 U.S. Army Warrior Trials race in just over one hour.

The Army Warrior Transition Command is hosting the Army Warrior Trials June 15-19 at West Point, N.Y. More than 100 wounded, ill and injured Soldiers, Marines, Airmen and Veterans are facing off in archery, shooting, cycling, track and field, swimming, sitting volleyball, and wheelchair basketball. The Army Warrior Trials help determine the athletes who will represent Team Army in the 2014 Warrior Games slated for Sep. 28-Oct. 4, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Johnson, from Aberdeen, South Dakota, first discovered cycling while he was recovering at a Warrior Transition Unit (WTU) at Fort Riley, Kansas. An activity that kept him physically fit, cycling also impacted his recovery. It gave Johnson a more positive outlook and attitude, gave him something to focus on and motivated him to push himself to achieve his goals. “I do it a little bit differently, but I can do the same thing as anybody else,” said Johnson. “Life is not over just because of an injury.”

Tandem cycling is a partnership. The pilot steers and shifts gears from the front seat while the second seat acts as the motor. Everything has to be in sync. The partners must have faith and trust in one another. Generally, tandem cyclists practice for months before a race. In Johnson and Sgt. 1st Class Mathis’ case, the pair had just four days of practice before the competition.

“I had never heard of a blind person riding a bike before,” said Sgt. 1st Class Mathis. “He said, ‘I’ve been doing this for years.’ He coached me. He drove me. He is totally unbelievable.”

Sgt. 1st Class Mathis, a member of the Cadre at the WTU at Fort Leonardwood, Missouri, volunteered to come to Warrior Trials. A wounded Soldier and Veteran himself, Sgt. 1st Class Mathis has firsthand experience with the recovery and rehabilitation process and can connect with other recovering warriors. He brought his bike along, and when he arrived at the Army Warrior Trials he was paired with Johnson.

“To do something totally in sync with another disabled person—to ride together, to drink water together—you do everything with that person, not for that person,” explained Sgt. 1st Class Mathis.

Adaptive reconditioning activities like cycling provide an opportunity for recovering warriors to reconnect with who they were before their wound, illness or injury. “You may be wounded, ill or injured but you’re not defeated. Life is not over,” said Sgt. 1st Class Mathis.

“Every time we go out and ride there’s a hill. Attack it. You can beat it,” he said. “You motivate people when you have every reason to quit and you don’t.”

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**CUTLINE:** Sgt. 1st Class Brian Mathis pilots as retired Staff Sgt. Sean Johnson acts as the motor for a tandem bike in the 2014 U.S. Army Warrior Trials cycling competition. Johnson, from Aberdeen, South Dakota, is the first blind athlete to compete for team Army. . The Army Warrior Transition Command is hosting the Army Warrior Trials June 15-19 at West Point, N.Y. More than 100 wounded, ill and injured Soldiers, Marines, Airmen and Veterans are facing off in archery, shooting, cycling, track and field, swimming, sitting volleyball, and wheelchair basketball. The Army Warrior Trials help determine the athletes who will represent Team Army in the 2014 Warrior Games slated for Sep. 28-Oct. 4, Colorado Springs, Colorado. (U .S. Army Photos by Benny Ontiveros)

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Warrior Transition Command (WTC) is a major subordinate command under the U.S. Army Medical Command (MEDCOM). WTC's mission is to develop, coordinate and integrate the Army's Warrior Care and Transition Program (WCTP) for wounded, ill and injured soldiers, veterans and their families. For more information on WTC, visit the new WTC website, [www.WTC.army.mil](http://www.WTC.army.mil), follow on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/armyWTC> or join Facebook at <http://facebook.com/armyWTC>.

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