

RiVER CiTY DAiLY

Friday, June 29, 2012

Newsletter of the 32nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Getting in the Game

**Karen Risser takes her best shot
during wheelchair basketball**

Photo by Stephen Tyler



ROADBLOCK RISSEY

Karen Risser, a blonde, blue-eyed 22-year-old Army Veteran took her talents to Richmond to compete in her first Wheelchair Games where she earned the name “Roadblock Risser.”

Risser uses her smile to hide her feisty and in-control determination that assists her team in powering toward the net in this year’s basketball tournament. Spectators look forward to her giving the other team an aggressive “what for.”

Basketball is not new for Risser. She plays guard for Edinboro University where she has been a member of a wheelchair basketball team for three years. The team was originally a coed team but during her first year they branched out into an all women’s team.



Risser joined the Army and completed her training between her junior and senior years of high school and was injured in 2008 just after graduating. Following her first year of enlistment she was driving to drill and had an accident that resulted in a spinal cord injury.

North central Pennsylvania, a small and rural county, does not give Risser the opportunity to meet other Veterans with similar injuries. When she learned about the Games she signed up and traveled to Richmond with the team from Erie. As a member of Team Orange she is competing in three events slalom, basketball and bowling.

“The Games are an opportunity to meet other Veterans,” Risser said, adding the experience is opening her eyes to all the possibilities of what is available to her. “It is an inspiration to see all the sporting events that are out there and available.”

According to Risser’s mother “Karen is having a lot of fun being with other Veterans who have experienced life before and after injury. This is something that the people she goes to school with have not experienced.”

“Soldiers have the ability to share inside jokes and build a lasting camaraderie,” Risser’s mother said. She is so glad that her daughter has the opportunity to be part of the Games.

The dreams will not stop here at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Risser is proudly working toward a career in helping others through social work. She hopes to graduate next year and use her experiences to work with Veterans with spinal cord injuries.

Athlete Michael Kabat, Then...

In 2010, Michael Kabat from Onalaska Wis., had advanced far enough in his therapy that recreation therapists at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center recommended he consider attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) in Denver. Long before a Veteran attends an event of this magnitude or even before he goes home, providers, nurses and therapists focus on getting them back into the community first.

“We try to find out what makes them tick,” said Brian Walker a recreation therapist for 20 years at the Clement Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee Wis., who now serves as their Community Relations Manager. “Our entire focus is getting the Veterans back into the community, not the hospital, which includes different challenges like getting through doors and how to use transportation.”

Getting a Veteran to attend the games is more of a long-range goal—certainly one suited for Kabat’s competitiveness.

“We try to get the novice or a Veteran with a newer injury to come to the Games,” said Walker. “To see it, to experience it. The Games really show the VA at their best.”

Michael Kabat was one of 21 Veterans in 2010 with spinal cord injuries attending the Games representing the Milwaukee VA. He competed in four events (motorized wheelchair rally, motorized slalom, powerchair 200 relay and powerchair soccer) earning a gold medal in the motorized wheelchair rally.

“The games are just awesome,” said Kabat. “I’m really inspired. I’ve learned so much about things I didn’t know about living in a wheelchair and I met so many great friends.”

And Now!

Michael Kabat rolled toward the registration table at the 32nd Annual NVWG in Richmond, Va., wearing a Green Bay Packers jersey and bright, red Ronald McDonald shoes. There was one other very noticeable change—no powerchair.

“Things are coming along great,” exclaimed Kabat flexing his arms and flashing a huge smile. “I’ve got my biceps back.”

Three years ago, it took Kabat 1 ½ hours to complete a ½ mile at the indoor track at the local YMCA. Today, he does 5-6 miles in that same time.

“He is super-competitive,” said caregiver Julie Van den Heuvel. “It was kind of funny, when he was running into things, but Michael doesn’t quit. He and I train now for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week. That is, if he’s not talking to someone.”

At this year’s Games, Kabat will compete in the javelin, discus, power lifting and air guns, all sports where he must generate his own power, something he could not do three years ago.

“I’m lifting weights, getting stronger,” said Kabat. “I want to take up hand-cycling and do a 5K.”





MICHAEL THOMAS



LINDA HUTCHISON



JUDITH RUIZ



KEVIN TENNEY



JAMES MILLIKEN



VIENNA SMITH



PLAY BALL!

Four 12-athlete teams meet on a warm and sunny morning here in Richmond to play softball. Ten players are on the field for each inning. Families, volunteers and fellow athletes are on the sidelines cheering and showing their support. Cries of “Good eye, man!” and “Wait for the good pitch!” fill the air. Some wave banners, others clap and shout while others sit quietly and take it all in.

“We think it’s really important to support these Veteran-athletes and also to show the Games’ sponsors how much we appreciate them,” says one of the spectators.

The game announcer keeps everyone straight on who’s at bat, who is on deck and the games’ status. A lot of small details help provide a great atmosphere. The medical team and field support for emergency wheelchair repair are on hand, well-placed to respond if needed to either field of play.

The teams are “pick-up” teams, explains Black Team Coach Javier Barazza. “We get to know each other when the players are selected, and then...we play as a team.” Each player will play in the infield and the outfield, one of the game requirements. This is Barazza’s first year at the Games. He gathers his teammates together between innings in a circle. “One, Two, Three...Black Team!” they yell together, pumping each other up for the next inning.

Barazza takes up his position down the first base line and watches his players. Another athlete is at bat. There’s a man on first with one out. After a powerful swing, the batter is out at first but not before advancing the runner to third base. “Way to go!” yell her teammates and Barazza. The next batter strikes out and the fifth inning is over. Determination is written on every athlete’s face.

One of the younger Veteran-athletes is deeply involved in conversation with a boy, also in a chair, offering heartfelt words of encouragement and frequent “high fives” as the youngster recounts his stories of athletic goals and achievements.

It’s easy to see why they love the games softball. It’s all about the teamwork.



Canteen—Serving Heroes Daily

If you ask Ray Tober what it means to support the Wheelchair Games, he says he’s just happy to serve America’s heroes. That’s staying on message in PR-speak. His company’s motto is: “Proud to Serve Genuine American Heroes Every Day.”

Tober is chief executive officer for the Veterans Canteen Service, which is just one of many companies that sponsor the Wheelchair Games. The sponsors contribute money and in-kind donations to bring the Games to life and enhance the experience for Veterans and their families.

Here at the Games, the Canteen sponsored the rocking Block Party on Wednesday night and the Archery event. But most of us recognize them for their raffles with prizes like i-pads and flat screen TVs. Those are items they sell in their retail stores at VA medical centers nationwide. The Canteen stores are located in 185 VA facilities, according to their chief engineer Sylvia Wallace. And they give 100% of their profits back to serving Veterans, in part through sponsorship of all six of VA’s adaptive sport and art therapy programs.

So when you see sponsors at the Games this week, be sure to say hi and let them know we appreciate their support – both here at the Games and throughout the year.

ORIGINAL ATHLETE PROFILE

WANNIE “IKE” COOK, U.S. ARMY VETERAN

Army Veteran Ike Cook took the first step towards becoming the athlete he is today when a good friend, Charlie Hayden, encouraged him to take a shot at wheelchair basketball.

After being injured in Vietnam, Cook began his road to recovery at McGuire Medical Center and began learning about life after injury. His friend Charlie encouraged him to join the basketball team and this is where he saw firsthand what he could do in a chair. He got involved in other sports such as track and field and started hunting.

Cook and other Veterans worked with Tom Brown to create the first ever Veterans Wheelchair Games. The goal was to show recently injured Veterans the adaptive sports available and encourage them to be active in the community. In the first Games, Cook participated in track and field and slalom. The following year, Ike took Veterans to the 1982 games in Milwaukee. Each year, Cook would help build excitement for the Games among staff and Veterans and the number of participants continued to grow. New organizations were formed with more Veterans getting involved in adaptive sports.

For the Games, Cook will be participating in the slalom event. In order to stay in shape and prepare

for the games he trains daily. Exercising is an overall part of his lifestyle. It gives him energy and helps control his weight. He lift weights, pushes his chair, handcycles and uses various types of equipment.

For the new participants are who just starting out in this year’s Games, he hopes they “open their eyes, keep an open mind and try to take in as much as possible.” He said, “Get a DVD at the Games, keep it and look at it often. What you learn you will keep for a lifetime...once you participate, you will be consumed with being the best in your event.”



Wheelchair Repair

Whether it’s the grueling slalom with its intense obstacle course or the basketball elimination games with its wheel-to-wheel contact, there is no doubt that the Richmond games push wheelchairs to their ultimate capability.

“It takes a 20-member repair team to keep these Games rolling,” joked Joe Schumacher, an expert with Invacare, which supports onsite wheelchair repairs.

From reinstalling handlebars on a bike for long-distance travel or changing the wheels of a chair that’s been through rugby battle, Veterans know to go to E10A when their equipment needs some loving care.

“For me it’s a great opportunity to see the products we manufacture in action,” Schumacher said. “It’s good to see



where we’ve made progress and get feedback from the Veterans to make enhancements in the future.”

ODDS & ENDS

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS			
FRIDAY, JUNE 29	ACTIVITY	CLASS-DIV	LOCATION/VENUE
5:30–9:00 A.M.	BREAKFAST		HOTELS
8 A.M.	FIELD	IV	MARY MUNFORD PK
	TRACK	IA-B-C	SPORTS BACKERS
9 A.M.	FIELD	V	MARY MUNFORD PK
	POWERCHAIR 200	MOTORIZED	SPORTS BACKERS
10 A.M.	POWERCHAIR RELAY	MOTORIZED	SPORTS BACKERS
	FIELD	III	MARY MUNFORD PK
11 A.M.	FIELD	II	MARY MUNFORD PK
10:30–1:30 P.M.	LUNCH		SPORTS BACKERS
2 P.M.	FIELD	IA-B-C	MARY MUNFORD PK
	TRACK	II-V	SPORTS BACKERS
4–6:30 P.M.	DINNER		HALL A / GRCC
7 P.M.	SWIMMING	ALL	GRAP
	WEIGHTLIFTING	QUAD	BALLROOM / GRCC
	WEIGHTLIFTING	ALL	BALLROOM / GRCC

GRCC = GREATER RICHMOND CONVENTION CENTER

AWARDS SCHEDULE		
FRIDAY, JUNE 29	ACTIVITY	LOCATION/VENUE
IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING EVENT	WEIGHTLIFTING	BANQUET HALL / GRCC

GRCC = GREATER RICHMOND CONVENTION CENTER



Attention Athletes!

Don't forget to pick up your medals at the awards table in the Convention Center if you were unable to attend the formal presentation.

Medical Clinics

Hotel medical suites will be open daily from 7 a.m.–10:30 p.m. Staff will be on call from 10:30 p.m. until 7 a.m. and can be reached by calling your hotel's front desk. The operator will take the Veteran's name and room number before contacting medical staff.

Hilton Garden Inn, Room 218
(804) 344-4300, Ext. 7218

Crowne Plaza, Room 1124
(804) 788-0791, Ext. 1124

Omni Richmond, Rooms 319 & 321
(804) 344-7000, Ext. 7321

Greater Richmond Convention Cntr (GRCC)

Rooms E25 A & B
The Convention Center medical suite will be open daily from 7 a.m. until the last event at the Convention Center has ended. The suite will close Saturday, June 30 after the closing banquet.

Games medical staff are authorized to treat registered athletes or volunteers on duty. They can treat coaches and officials, but are unable to treat sponsors or family members. For more information, reference your Athletes and Coaches Guide.

Wheelchair Repair Shop

GRCC Room E10A

The repair shop will be open daily from 8 a.m.–5 p.m. (hours extended as necessary) until Saturday, June 30. Airport wheelchair repair will be available Sunday, June 24 and Sunday, July 1. Invacare minor repair service will be available at all off-site venues during events. For after-hours, emergency repair call (804) 314-4239.

JOIN IN THE CONVERSATION!

#NVWG... What is it?



Twitter hashtags allow you to post your own photos, videos, stories and experiences about the Wheelchair Games on Twitter! You can click on #NVWG at <http://www.twitter.com> to see what everyone is saying about the Games.

Like NVWG on Facebook



You can find the Games on Facebook. Just search for 2012 National Veterans Wheelchair Games, and click LIKE. Or click <http://www.facebook.com/wheelchairgames>.