

RIVER CITY DAILY

Saturday, June 30, 2012

Newsletter of the 32nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games



TRUE GRIT!

Veteran Joseph Zalenski fights through the final meters.

Photo by Scott R. Snell



Sean Michaud's attitude began to change. He was irritable and moody—becoming even more competitive during physical fitness training. The other Marines in his unit began to take notice and he soon found himself at the hospital. Doctors soon revealed a golf ball sized lump on the base of his cerebellum.

At the age of 22, Sean had to make a decision and he was given three choices. One—do nothing and hope the growth wouldn't impact his behavior anymore than it already had. But if the lump were to explode he'd have 10 minutes to live. The second option was to attack it with chemotherapy which only carried a 50 percent success rate. The third and most risky option was to remove the lump.



ROAD TO RECOVERY

"I had a six-month-old son at home," said Sean. "He wasn't going to grow up without a father. I told them I wanted the surgery."

Over the next year, Sean spent time recovering at the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa.

"Dad's coach, José has really helped him recover," chimes in 12-year-old Nicholas, who is attending his first Games and cheering on his dad.

Sean agrees with his son. Seven years ago, he met José Laguna in his hometown on San Antonio—the man who introduced him to rehabilitative sports and to the Wheelchair Games. Throughout the years, the Games have inspired him and pushed him physically and mentally.

"The Games help me stay in shape and have improved my cognitive function," said Sean. "Seeing the same faces year after year moves them into my long-term memory. Now, I remember who they are and what they do."

At the Games, Sean has competed in air guns, shot put and javelin. Nicholas and his dad have practiced javelin throughout the year with one goal in mind—to win the gold. Sean's goal is to win the gold in all three events so next year he can try something else. This way he can keep learning new sports and train his body.

"The Games not only allow me to make and meet new friends, but I keep hearing about their progress and it makes me want to get better!" said Sean. "I need to step up my game!"

Today, Sean celebrates his 35th birthday with his son and right-hand man Nicholas by his side. As Nick helps push his dad to the bus, they promise to be back next year.

"My favorite part of the Games is watching my dad compete and see him really happy," said Nicholas with a smile on his face.



power soccer meets sumo Joe



If you were near the Power Soccer court on Wednesday afternoon, you probably heard Siosif "Sumo Joe" Isamau, from Palo Alto, Cal., cheering and coaching the Royal Blue Team. When coaching his team Sumo Joe is as intense as they come and he said that, "being loud and intense helps [the athletes] know what to do." Sumo Joe, originally from Tonga, is the current U.S. Open Silver Medalist in sumo wrestling. This is Sumo Joe's eighth National Veterans Wheelchair Games and he coaches Athlete Nathan Jackson in power soccer and quad rugby. "I'm honored to be here. I really enjoy the family aspect of the Games and being able to encourage the athletes."

51 Weeks and Counting...

Richmond Passes the Games Torch

Veterans have 51 weeks to up their game and go for the gold in Tampa, Fla., the site for the 33rd National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

Tampa will officially become the host site on Saturday, June 30, 2012 when the torch is presented to Ms. Kathleen Fogarty, the Director of the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa, Fla.

Over the next year the Tampa staff will coordinate activities and make preparations to ensure the 2013 Wheelchair Games have a lasting impact on the Veterans who participate in the games and their families.

EYE ON THE BALL

To some, table tennis is addictive—they can't stay away from it. "I have a killer serve," says former U.S. Navy machinist mate Karen Van Benschoten, 52. An admittedly fierce competitor, she took home the gold in the table tennis and 9 Ball competitions at the Veterans National Wheelchair Games. These are her fifth wheelchair games.

"It takes some agility to keep up with and keep my eye on the ball. I have MS (Multiple Sclerosis) and it's definitely good for my upper body and torso."

The high speed of the game can sharpen a player's eyes as the balls spins and takes a path that can be difficult to follow. A player has to be able to think quickly and anticipate her opponent's moves with only a split second to launch a successful counterattack.

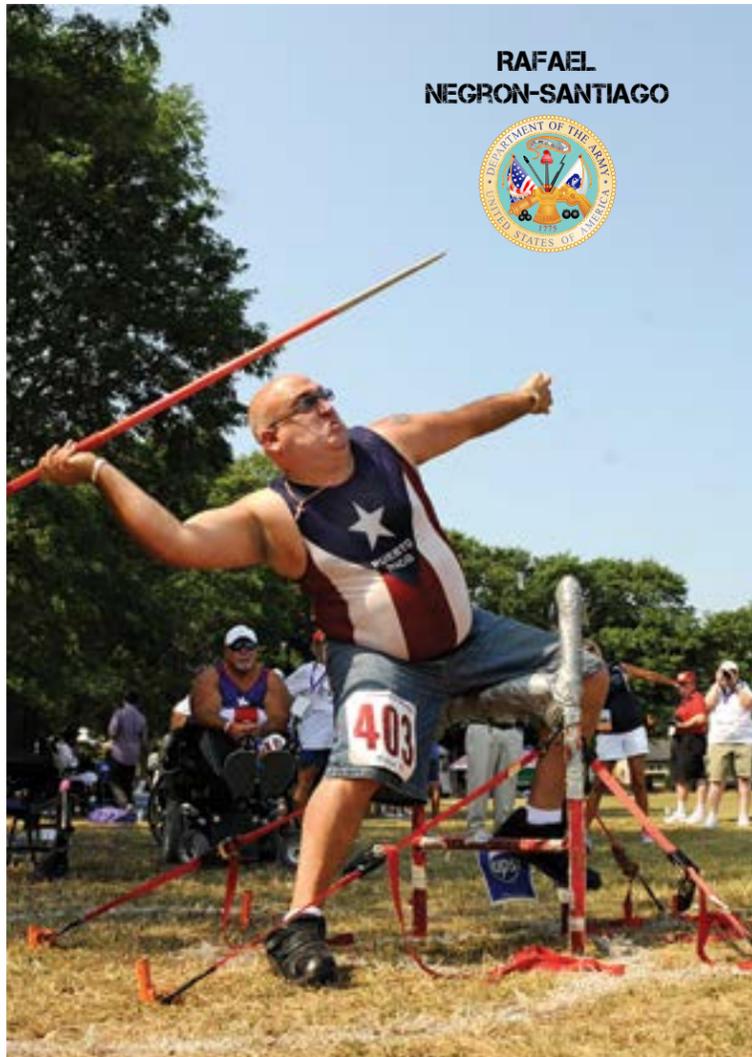
Her opponent, Veteran Greene, a former competitive swimmer, broke her neck in an automobile accident and has been in a wheelchair since age 21. These are her first Games and she's also competing in freestyle and backstroke swimming along with bowling and wheelchair slalom.

"I am so enjoying this experience," the San Jose, Ca. resident said. "I don't want to go sleep at night—there are so many people to talk to and just not enough time in the day."

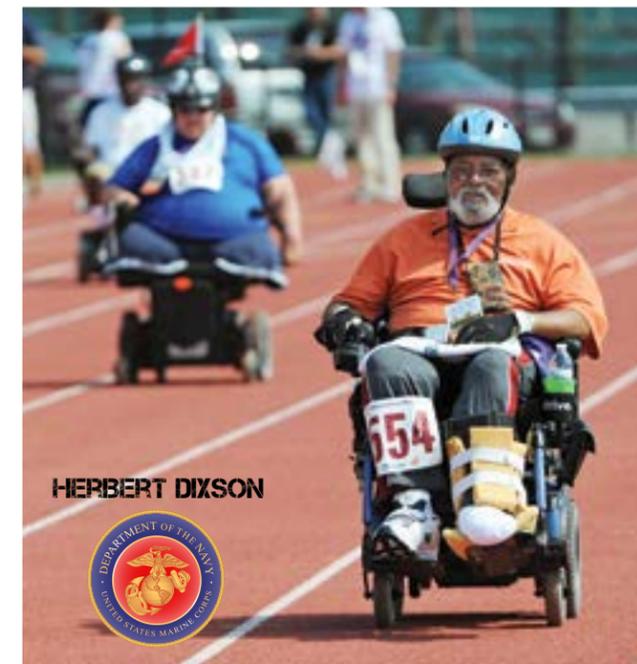




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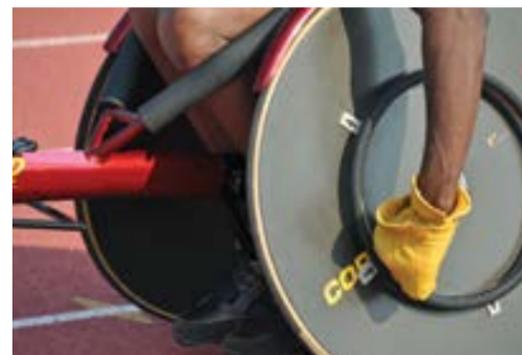
RAFAEL
NEGRON-SANTIAGO



HERBERT DIXON



JERRY BAYLOR



DORIS MERRILL



DARRYL LAIR



PRACTICE + PERSEVERANCE = PAY OFF

Sweat poured down the athlete's temples as he struggled to maneuver his manual wheelchair over the bumpy slalom course. In the background, the crowd cheered the Veteran on—willing him over each obstacle—one by one—until he rolled to the finish line, a broad smile on his face.

“Not something I could do. I'm not strong enough,” murmured one spectator who stood watching the timed action of the wheelchair slalom from the sidelines.

Another in the wings, a nearly 10-year Veteran of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, also watched the competition intently. A mentor to his Ohio team of athletes and a volunteer liaison at the Dayton VA Medical Center, Dale Spiller says it's vital that Veterans competing in such events train throughout the year. He believes strongly that you can—and must—be physically active no matter what your physical limitations.

“It's the Veterans' responsibility to keep themselves in good shape. They need to eat healthy and work out—pushing as much as possible—get in a mile or two in a day. In Dayton, we train with our coaches two to three times a week. We start that training in April.”

A former U.S. Air Force forward air controller, Spiller has used a wheelchair since 1996 when he suffered a spinal cord injury after falling from a tree. It was later that year that a VA recreation therapist mentioned the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. But his injury was new and he wasn't quite ready. In 2003, he decided to compete in events including softball, table tennis and field events like shot-put, javelin and discus. Since then, he's never looked back.

Sandy Turvey knows a lot about Veteran athletes like Dale Spiller. She's one of the coaches for the Ohio team competing at the Games. She's also a recreation specialist and adaptive sports coach at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center who works in the hospital's spinal cord injury unit. She says there are many opportunities for Veterans to get—and stay in shape. Preparing for the Games helps them do just that.

“Our Veterans select the sports they want to compete in and we do our best to find as many practice opportunities for them as possible. We don't have a gym or pool at the Cincinnati VA so we work closely with the city and others to do the training.”

Sandy's Veterans hone their air rifle skills at the local reserve unit while weight training, archery and some softball practice are provided through free memberships courtesy of the Cincinnati Recreation Commission.

“They need to be healthy and strong, and practice their sports. It's a holistic approach and year-round training is part of their therapy,” she says.

Watching the fiercely competitive team compete throughout the Wheelchair Games in Richmond, Va., you can conclude their practice and perseverance paid off.

The question is posed to their coach: Any ‘superstars’ on the Ohio team? Sandy answers with an “are you kidding?” kind of look. “They're all stars,” she smiles.



ATHLETE PROFILE



RANDY STONE U.S. ARMY VETERAN

Army Veteran Randy Stone is competing in his second National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) this week and began training for the Richmond games in March with McGuire VA Medical Center recreational therapists Nicole Shuman and April Short.

“The biggest thing is it helps me stay fit,” says Stone who is competing in four events at this year's Games. In his first experience at the NVWG in 2008 he participated in weight lifting, bowling, table tennis and air guns. He is excited for his new events; nine ball, where he earned a silver medal and archery. Bowling is his favorite event, but his best event is weight lifting. A weight lifter before he was injured, he notes that wheelchair lifting is significantly different. “It's all done on your back. The strength is still there, but there's more technique involved.”

For Veterans that have never competed in the Games, or think it's not for them, Stone says they should definitely give it a try. “There is so much you can learn. You learn about your body and you see guys that are fully independent and how much they can do. I'm having a lot of fun.”

TRAINING TURNS TO GOLD

Preparing for the National Veteran Wheelchair Games throughout the year is integral to winning. Veteran athletes embrace rigorous training in hopes of all that hard work paying off in the form of gold, silver or bronze. For Hack Albertson, the excitement of competing in his first handcycling competition has meant taking his Top End Excelerator XLT Pro out three to four times weekly. He said he attacks the two miles uphill in 20 minutes and two miles downhill in five.

“There's nothing like going down that hill with the breeze going through your hair and the bugs hitting you,” Albertson joked. “It's as close as you can get to a motorcycle.”

The U.S. Marine Corps Veteran said he became interested in the sport when his local Elk Lodge 524 in Madison, Ind. approached with a generous offer to provide the \$4,000 piece of light-weight machinery. Albertson said he wanted to lose weight and thought it would be beneficiary to take it on for both for his physical and mental well-being.

“It's something else to be in control of,” he confessed, as he played with his well-worn USMC baseball cap. “I can go by myself to places. I can ride next to motorcycles, be on my own.”

Albertson stressed that it's all about getting out and being active. As the Kentucky and Indiana Paralyzed Veterans of America treasurer, he said that one of his goals is encouraging organization members to get involved. Experiencing these games is an ideal outlet; being with others who share similar challenges and a common understanding.

Albertson will continue to train and serve as an inspiration to others as he sets his sights on the seven-day, 267-mile Sadler Alaska Challenge. The world's longest wheelchair and handcycle tour, promises to serve up brutal challenges along a varying terrain but the Marine Veteran is up for the task.



ODDS & ENDS

DEPARTURE PREPARATIONS

Prior to attending the closing ceremonies on Saturday evening all luggage and personal items that need to be delivered to the Richmond International Airport by UPS must be packed and ready for pick-up. Please assure that each bag or item to be picked-up has a UPS tag that is completely filled out, including departure airline and flight number. Hotel staff will only pick up luggage or personal items with UPS tags. Extra UPS tags are available at the Hospitality Desk.

Door hangers, as delivered with luggage at check-in and shown, must be placed on the outside door handle **NOT LATER THAN 5:00 P.M. SATURDAY** to indicate that your luggage is ready for pick-up (extra door hangers are also available at the Hospitality Desk). Place all luggage and personal items ready for pick-up just inside the door to your room, in plain view. Please note that if the door hanger is not displayed, and your luggage is not ready for pick-up by 5:00 p.m., you will be responsible for the delivery of those items to



the airport. Hotel staff will collect luggage between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. only from those rooms with door hangers displayed. A carry-on with essentials, including all medications, should stay in the room and NOT placed with the luggage to be picked-up by UPS.

Specialty chairs being staged at the Convention Center will be picked-up by UPS on Saturday evening and transported directly to the airport.

FOR THOSE PARTICIPANTS FLYING ON US AIRWAYS AND DELTA ONLY:

A representative from Delta and US Airways will be available on Saturday, June 30th from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the hotel to complete a passenger ID check for advanced check-in of luggage and specialty chairs being delivered to the airport by UPS. Please check with the front desk or the NVWG hospitality desk for location.

AIRPORT TRANSPORTATION:

Continuous shuttle service will run between 3:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on Sunday from the hotel. Please allow ample time prior to flight to arrive at the airport.

****The last shuttle leaves at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday. No transportation will be provided after that time.****

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

SATURDAY, JUNE 30	ACTIVITY	CLASS-DIV	LOCATION/VENUE
5:30–9:00 A.M.	BREAKFAST		HOTELS
7:30 A.M.	HANDCYCLING	ALL	MONUMENT AVE
9:00 A.M.	MOTOR RALLY	MOTORIZED	MCGUIRE VAMC
	SUPER "G" SLALOM	FINALS	HALL B / GRCC
10:30–1:30 P.M.	LUNCH		HALL A / GRCC
1 P.M.	POWER SOCCER	CHAMPIONSHIP GAME	HALLS C-D / GRCC
	BASKETBALL	CONSOLATION GAME	HALLS C-D / GRCC
3 P.M.	QUAD RUGBY	CHAMPIONSHIP GAME	HALLS C-D / GRCC
	BASKETBALL	CHAMPIONSHIP GAME	HALLS C-D / GRCC
7 P.M.	CLOSING BANQUET		HALL A / GRCC

GRCC = GREATER RICHMOND CONVENTION CENTER

AWARDS SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, JUNE 29	ACTIVITY	LOCATION/VENUE
10:30–11:30 A.M.	SUPER "G" SLALOM	HALL B / GRCC
11 A.M.–3 P.M.	ARCHERY ALL TRACK AND FIELD EVENTS ANY AWARD NOT PICKED UP TO DATE	AWARDS STAGE / GRCC
1–3 P.M.	SWIMMING ANY AWARD NOT PICKED UP TO DATE	AWARDS STAGE / GRCC
2:30–3 P.M.	POWER SOCCER, BASKETBALL	HALLS D / GRCC
3–5 P.M.	QUAD RUGBY, BASKETBALL	HALLS D / GRCC
3–7 P.M.	ANY AWARD NOT PICKED UP (NO FORMAL PRESENTATION)	AWARDS STAGE / GRCC
9–10 P.M.	ANY AWARD NOT PICKED UP (NO FORMAL PRESENTATION)	AWARDS STAGE / GRCC

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