



# 34TH NATIONAL VETERANS WHEELCHAIR GAMES

## History of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games are an outgrowth of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' historic involvement in wheelchair sports. Wheelchair sports had their beginning in the aftermath of World War II, when young disabled Veterans began playing wheelchair basketball in VA hospitals throughout the United States. Interest in wheelchair basketball soon spread to other sports such as track and field, bowling, swimming, and archery, spawning the formation of several associations devoted to new and innovative wheelchair sports.

While the participation of paralyzed and other disabled Veterans continued to flourish during the intervening years, it was not until 1980, when VA established a Recreation Therapy Service, that VA's efforts brought about an enhanced awareness of the rehabilitative value of wheelchair athletics. Since then, VA therapists have used wheelchair sports as a therapeutic tool for treating disabled Veterans.

The first National Veterans Wheelchair Games were held in 1981, the "International Year of Disabled Persons," at the VA Medical Center in Richmond, VA. That year, 74 veterans from 14 states competed in sports ranging from table tennis and billiards, to swimming and weightlifting. Those first Games established an enduring trait that has characterized the event ever since — a strong sense of common identity and camaraderie among the participants. The now 500+

Veterans who choose to compete in the Games each year demonstrate their continuing popularity.

By 1985, the growing size, complexity, and resources needed for the Games presented a daunting challenge to VA medical centers hosting the program. Recognizing that most of the athletes were paralyzed Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) offered to become a co-host. To help obtain resources needed to host this national event, PVA recruited corporations to join in support of the Games. Since 1985, PVA's corporate sponsor program has helped the Games to grow, both in number of competitors as well as variety of sports offered.

In 1987, 12 British military Veterans were invited to participate in the Games and a team from Great Britain has come every year since. After that first year, the British athletes formed a new disabled sports group — The British Ex-Services Wheelchair Sports Association. This group extended the philosophy behind the National Veterans Wheelchair Games to the rest of the world, hosting International Veterans Wheelchair Games in Great Britain in 1994, 1996, and 1999.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games represents the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world. Both VA and PVA are committed to the rehabilitation of disabled Veterans through these Games, and will continue their efforts to make the National Veterans Wheelchair Games more challenging and rewarding every year.

### Athletes Competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games

1981, Richmond, Virginia.....	74
1982, Milwaukee, Wisconsin .....	137
1983, Long Beach, California .....	178
1984, Brockton, Massachusetts .....	272
1985, College Park, Maryland.....	280
1986, Dallas, Texas .....	360
1987, Ann Arbor, Michigan .....	389
1988, San Antonio, Texas.....	460
1989, Long Beach, California .....	397
1990, New Orleans, Louisiana.....	550
1991, Miami, Florida .....	487
1992, Dayton, Ohio .....	492
1993, San Antonio, Texas.....	454
1994, Kansas City, Missouri.....	473
1995, Atlanta, Georgia .....	519
1996, Seattle, Washington .....	487
1997, San Diego, California.....	577
1998, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania .....	539
1999, San Juan, Puerto Rico .....	555
2000, San Antonio, Texas.....	587
2001, New York, New York .....	523
2002, Cleveland, Ohio .....	484
2003, Long Beach, California .....	540
2004, St. Louis, Missouri.....	518
2005, Minneapolis, Minnesota .....	498
2006, Anchorage, Alaska .....	527
2007, Milwaukee, Wisconsin .....	513
2008, Omaha, Nebraska .....	497
2009, Spokane, Washington.....	511
2010, Denver, CO .....	583
2011, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania .....	567
2012, Richmond, Virginia.....	514
2013, Tampa, Florida .....	567

Co-Presented By



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