



Sgt. Kawaiola Nahale, assigned to the 311th Signal Command, swims the 25-meter breaststroke during the Army Trials on April 2 at Fort Bliss, Texas. (Photo by Meghan Portillo/NCO Journal)

# Wounded Soldiers Compete In Army Trials For A Shot At The Warrior Games

*By Meghan Portillo — NCO Journal*

**R**etired Sgt. Scotty Hasting closed his eyes, blocking out the surrounding distractions. He took a deep breath and focused on the feel of the bow in his hand before opening his eyes and letting his arrow fly during the Army Trials on March 31 at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Hasting was one of about 75 active-duty Soldiers and veterans who competed from March 29 to April 2 in cycling, shooting, archery, track and field, wheelchair basketball, seated volleyball and swimming for spots on

the Army team headed to the Department of Defense Warrior Games in June. Only 40 athletes will be selected to defend the Army's title against the Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Special Operations Command during the competition at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Quantico, Va.

The Marines won the Chairman's Cup, presented to the top overall service branch, at the first four Warrior Games, but the Army took the cup for the first time in 2014.

“You know the Marine Corps makes a lot of noise, but we speak through performance,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew T. Brady, command sergeant major for the Warrior Transition Command. “They’ll have home turf, but we look to keep our cup.”

## Recovery Through Sports

The trials, conducted by the Warrior Transition Command, are part of the Army Warrior Care and Transition program, which aids in the recovery of wounded, ill and injured Soldiers and veterans as they transition back into the force or the civilian community.

“Our adaptive reconditioning program is a critical part of warriors’ transition,” Brady said. “It’s not just a sports program. It’s a program of activity in support of the surgeon general’s Performance Triad – sleep, proper nutrition and activity. For many of these Soldiers, this is kind of their ‘new norm’ – picking up activities they may have never tried before. It’s a new outlet. So if you look at the shooting, it takes concentration, the ability to block out distractions, a great amount of discipline – and these are all things that set you up for other tasks in life.”

In addition to aiding in their physical and mental recovery, these sports give Soldiers a new passion and something to look forward to doing when they leave the military, Brady said. Veterans Affairs and civilian organizations offer adaptive sports programs all over the nation, and sponsors often help defray the cost. Transition coordinators within every Warrior Transition Unit work to connect Soldiers with these organizations when they leave, Brady said, as should NCOs across the Army as they help injured and ill Soldiers prepare for life outside the military.



Retired Sgt. Scotty Hasting prepares for the archery event of the Army Trials on March 31 at Fort Bliss. (Photo by Meghan Portillo/NCO Journal)

“We have them for maybe two years, but these Soldiers will be veterans for the rest of their lives,” Brady

said. “We have got to set them up for success down the road.

“I hope NCOs realize I only have a certain number of these individuals in this Integrated Disability Evaluation System process — I only have a fraction of them. The majority of them are out in the force. They are out in the force and being led by NCOs, and as they go through the challenges of recovery, these same sports are available to them. What I need NCOs to do is to support this type of activity because that individual is going to leave our military, and we don’t want them becoming



Master Sgt. Shawn Vosburg, assigned to the WTB at Fort Bliss, takes aim during the rifle event of the Army Trials on March 30 at Fort Bliss. (Photo by Meghan Portillo/NCO Journal)



Sp. Sydney Davis, assigned to the Warrior Transition Battalion at Fort Belvoir, Va., prepares to throw the shotput during the Army Warrior Trials on April 1 at Fort Bliss. (Photo by Meghan Portillo/NCO Journal)

sedentary. We don't want them leaving and feeling like they don't have something to look forward to. I need NCOs' support."

### Mentoring Others

Many of the NCOs leaving the Warrior Transition Battalion have found a new use for their leadership skills within civilian and veteran adaptive sports programs, Brady said.

"In the Army, we make leaders," he said. "That's just what we do. And these civilian organizations have individuals who grew up with challenges, were born with challenges or may have gotten it by the result of some



Staff Sgt. Max Hasson, assigned to the WTB in Fort Carson, Colo., throws during the seated discus event of the Army Trials on April 1 at Fort Bliss. (Photo by Meghan Portillo/NCO Journal)

kind of trauma. ... Now, our Soldier is going to have the opportunity as a veteran to be in this same group with them and provide mentorship – they will be able to use those leadership skills to be a mentor to a young child, for example, who has never known what it is like to walk."

Training for the Warrior Games has helped Hasting recover from the 10 gunshot wounds he suffered in Afghanistan – five in the shoulder and five in the hip – and he is eager to help others, he said, to overcome the challenges he knows too well.

"The NCO inside of me wants to help all these other people who are down," Hasting said. "The values that are instilled in us as NCOs, the way that we are programmed – it's not about us; it's more about trying to help everyone else out.

"If you're having troubles, I've been there. It's hard to get back up and back at it. But it will work out better in the long run if you just get up and do something. As an NCO, I try to push that."

If he is chosen for the team, this will be Hasting's second year at the Warrior Games, and he said he seeks out opportunities to mentor others wanting to shoot competitively.

"Archery is my favorite – when everything else is going on, for the time that you are shooting, it's just you and that bow," he said. "Nothing else matters. That's why I gravitate toward archery. It's that outlet for me."

### A New Normal

Sgt. Joshua Palmer can attest to the life-changing aspect of an adaptive sports program. For him, smaller injuries built upon one another, eventually leading to a debilitating condition that would end his military aspirations. During the Special Forces selection process, Palmer shattered his ankles and had to have both completely reconstructed.

"You never know what you've got until it's gone," he said. "When you spend eight months on bed rest, it's a really humbling experience. If I wanted something to eat, I would literally have to low-crawl to the kitchen and sit on the floor by the fridge and eat an apple."

Palmer had to accept that he could no longer be an engineer deep-sea diver. He would never join Special Forces. His career had come to a halt.

The adaptive sports program gave him his life back.

“I never thought I would be this active again,” he said. “Never.”

He went from not being able to walk to competing in almost every event of the Army Trials. The experience taught him a lot, he said, about the kind of leadership a Soldier needs while recovering. Encouragement is key, he said, but it is also important to not push an individual too far.

“If an NCO has a good Soldier who gets hurt, he or she needs to allow that Soldier time to recover,” he said. “Listen to him. Be genuine, and take the time to get to

know him. Know his 100 percent, and then know his injury 100 percent. And be respectful of that, because you can hurt that Soldier in the long run if you push him to be too active.”

Palmer is retiring soon, but he said if he were going back into his field, he would take a more active role in his Soldiers’ health and well-being.

“I would be more involved,” Palmer said. “I would go with them to their initial appointments, follow up with their doctors. I’d get reports from their doctors on how they are doing, so that the way I talk to and encourage the Soldier is in-line with the doctor’s recommendations. I would be much more respectful and understanding of that Soldier’s recovery, because now I have been there.” ■

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