

WCAP NCO wins gold by smashing Paralympic swimming record

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Sgt. Elizabeth Marks broke a Paralympic swimming world record in winning her first gold medal at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Marks won the women's 100-meter breaststroke with a time of 1.28:13. (Photo courtesy U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program)

She continues to make her Marks.

Sgt. Elizabeth Marks, a medic and Paralympic swimmer who is part of the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program of Fort Carson, Colorado, offered a reminder of why she's captured the world's attention this year with her performance Saturday at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The 25-year-old set a new world record en route to winning a gold medal in the women's 100-meter breaststroke. She finished the race in the SB7 division, a disability swimming classification, with a time of 1.28:13, more than four seconds ahead of her American teammate Jessica Long, who won silver. Lisa Deb Braber of the Netherlands took bronze.

"I had no idea (I was winning)," Marks told reporters after the race. "I can't see when I am swimming. About 25 meters in I have no idea where anybody else is. As long as I feel pressure on my hands I know it is going well. I was just hoping for the best and putting everything I had into it."

Marks' impairments stem from the bilateral hip injuries she sustained while deployed as a combat medic to Iraq in 2010. She underwent several painful surgeries and exhaustive rehabilitation before finally being deemed fit for duty in July 2012. Along the way, Marks took up swimming as a means to assist in her recovery. She was pushed to compete in her newfound sport when she saw the hope it offered her fellow wounded Soldiers.

But her health suffered another setback in 2014. Marks traveled to London in the fall of that year to compete in the inaugural Invictus Games when she collapsed with respiratory distress syndrome. Her condition worsened and she was eventually taken to Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, England, and placed on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, or ECMO, life support to help her breathe. She missed the Games, but Marks said later that she was fortunate to be alive.

A month after her ordeal in England, Marks was swimming again. Two months after leaving the hospital, she broke an American record in the SB9 200-meter breaststroke.

Marks made international headlines earlier this year for her gesture of immense gratitude and humility at the Invictus Games in Orlando, Florida.

She was decorated with her fourth gold medal at the Games by Prince Harry, the British royal who created the competition, an international Paralympic-style, multi-sport event that allows wounded, injured or sick armed services personnel and veterans to compete. After he placed the medal around Marks' neck, she gave the award back.

Marks wanted Prince Harry to deliver the medal to the hospital that helped save her life. Her request was honored June 1.

In July, Marks became the first active-duty service member to be presented with the Pat Tillman Award for Service at the ESPYs, an awards show that recognizes grand achievements in sports.

Now, two months later, she is a gold medalist and world-record holder in her Paralympics debut. And she may not be done yet. Marks is scheduled to compete in four other swimming events during the games beginning with the S8 100-meter backstroke Tuesday.

Archer remains in hunt for medal

Staff Sgt. Michael Lukow's aim was true.

The infantryman and Paralympic archer in the WCAP advanced to the medal rounds of the men's individual recurve bow competition after his performance Saturday. Lukow advanced past the ranking round with a score of 577, the day's 23rd best mark. He will face Lung-Hui Tseng of Chinese Taipei in the round of 32 on Tuesday. Saturday also saw Staff Sgt. John Joss compete in the mixed R3 10-meter rifle prone competition. Joss did not qualify for the medal round but his time in Rio is not complete. He will compete in the mixed R6 50-meter rifle prone competition Wednesday.