



Coaches and athletes huddle before basketball practice during the Army Trials at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, on March 28, 2015. (Photo by EJ Hersom / DoD News)

Athletes on Army Team Remain Confident as They Prepare for Warrior Games

By Meghan Portillo - NCO Journal

Wounded warrior athletes on the Army team are more confident than ever that they will take home the Chairman's Cup again this year at the conclusion of the Department of Defense Warrior Games, which will take place from June 19-28 at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Quantico, Va.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Smith, who this year will compete in the games for the second time, said there is no doubt in his mind that the Army will leave the games again with the cup, which is awarded to the service branch with the highest medal total. "Last year was the first year that we won the Chairman's Cup, so I'm definitely looking forward to competing against the other branches and bringing that trophy home again."

Smith is among the 40 wounded, ill and injured Soldiers and veterans picked to defend the Army's title against the Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, U.S. Special Operations Command and the British armed forces.



Sgt. 1st Class Michael Smith, a member of the Army team, swims laps during training for the 2014 Warrior Games at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Kaily Brown / U.S. Army)

The athletes were selected from about 75 veterans and active-duty Soldiers who competed in March during the Army Trials at Fort Bliss, Texas, in cycling, shooting, archery, track and field, wheelchair basketball, seated volleyball and swimming.

Smith, who will compete in swimming, track, field, cycling and sitting volleyball, said he speaks for the whole team when he says he is proud to have been selected.

“It means everything to me to represent the Army at the Warrior Games, because I believe in the Army. If it wasn’t for the Army, I wouldn’t be the type of man I am today. I wouldn’t be the father that I am today. I wouldn’t be the friend I am today. So to be able to represent something I truly believe in and love is an honor.”

This will be the first year that the games are hosted by a service branch instead of at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. Though the majority of the crowd in Quantico will be cheering on the Marine Corps, Smith said he and his teammates are not worried.

“That makes it that much sweeter – to beat them in their own house,” Smith said. “I can’t wait to smash them again and look them in the eyes and tell them that we beat them on their home turf. I’m looking forward to that.”

Recovery through sports

The athletes train for the games as part of the U.S. Army Warrior Transition Command’s Army Warrior Care and Transition program, which aids in the recovery of wounded, ill and injured Soldiers and veterans as they prepare themselves for life back in the force or as civilians.

Smith is the first Soldier with an above-the-elbow amputation to remain on active duty, and he credits the sports program for his success.

In 2011, Smith’s motorcycle was rear-ended. He flew over a freeway median, then was hit by an oncoming truck before crashing into the ground. He is blessed to be alive, Smith said, and is grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve.

“If it wasn’t for the Warrior Transition Command and the Warrior Games, and everything they provide, I wouldn’t be in the position I am in now,” Smith said.

In December, Smith began his duties as a recruiting center commander in Little Rock, Ark. He is in charge of 25 NCO recruiters, and said he is aware of how much they look up to him. He hopes that, through his example, they will see that an injury in no way lessens a leader’s influence.

“No matter your situation – whether it is physical, mental, emotional or whatever the case may be – Soldiers still look up to you,” Smith said. “If you are an NCO, a noncommissioned officer, you are still supposed



to lead from the front – no matter what. That is my whole reason for coming back to active duty. I’m a leader. I’m a senior NCO. I didn’t make E7 by sleeping. The Army instilled in me the leadership skills that I have, and I want to continue to lead.”

Always striving for a new goal

Even after all Smith has accomplished, he has not stopped creating fresh goals for himself.

He hopes to one day work for the Warrior Transition Command to recruit other athletes, set up camps and motivate wounded warriors. He said he knows that if they can be inspired to give it their best, they will be competitive in their sports, in their recovery and in life.

“If you can learn to swim with one arm, learn to run with a prosthetic, if you can tackle that goal and defeat that, any other obstacle that comes your way in life, you are going to take that same approach, and just know that you can do it,” Smith said.

Smith is also still striving toward new goals as an athlete. He has been training to join the USA Skeleton Sled team, and is determined to take home the title of “Ultimate Warrior” from next year’s Warrior Games.

“I would have to place in every event they offer. It’s something I wanted to go for this year, but because I am working in recruiting, I didn’t have the ability to go to



Smith retrieves a volleyball during practice for the 2014 Warrior Games at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. (Photo by Spc. Charles M. Bailey / U.S. Army)

any shooting camps. Next year, that is definitely my goal. I will be the Ultimate Warrior next year. That's what I'm going to do."

Following is a list of athletes on the 2015 Army team. The list is subject to change. For more information and to view coach and team-member bios, click here.

- Staff Sgt. Ashley Anderson, Fort Riley, Kan.
- Spc. Anthony Ateomon, Fort Bragg, N.C.

- Staff Sgt. Thomas Ayers, Clarksville, Tenn.
- Spc. Dustin Barr, Fort Bragg, N.C.
- Capt. Frank Barroqueiro, Gainesville, Ga.
- Capt. Steven Bortle, Pearl City, Hawaii
- Spc. Terry Cartwright, Fort Belvoir, Va.
- Spc. Laurel Cox, Fort Belvoir, Va.
- Spc. Sydney Davis, Fort Belvoir, Va.
- 1st Lt. Kelly Elmlinger, Joint Base San Antonio
- Staff Sgt. Randi Gavell, Oklahoma City, Okla.
- Sgt. 1st Class Samantha Goldenstein, Saint Robert, Miss.
- Sgt. Colton Harms, Fort Riley, Kan.
- Sgt. Sean Hook, Summerville, S.C.
- Sgt. Blake Johnson, Bethesda, Md.
- Staff Sgt. Sean Johnson, Aberdeen, S.D.
- Sgt. Kawaiola Nahale, Fort Shafter, Hawaii
- Spc. Chasity Kuczer, Fort Knox, Ky.
- Sgt. 1st Class Katie Kuiper, San Antonio, Texas
- Spc. Stefan Leroy, Bethesda, Md.
- Staff Sgt. Monica Martinez, Bethesda, Md.
- Staff Sgt. Andrew McCaffrey, Arlington, Va.
- Staff Sgt. Michael McPhall, Bethesda, Md.
- Staff Sgt. Billy Meeks, Las Cruces, N.M.
- Cpl. Mathew Mueller, Fort Carson, Colo.
- Master Sgt. Rhoden Galloway, San Antonio, Texas
- Staff Sgt. Eric Pardo, San Antonio, Texas
- 1st Lt. Christopher Parks, Fort Hood, Texas
- Staff Sgt. Timothy Payne, Raleigh, N.C.
- Cpl. Jasmine Perry, Fort Campbell, Ky.
- Sgt. Zedrik Pitts, Birmingham, Ala.
- Spc. Haywood Range, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.
- Capt. Will Reynolds, Bethesda, Md.
- Staff Sgt. Alexander Shaw, Clarksville, Tenn.
- Chief Warrant Officer Timothy Sifuentes, Fort Riley, Kan.
- Staff Sgt. Monica Southall, Henrico, Va.
- Sgt. 1st Class Michael Smith, Little Rock, Ark
- Sgt. Patrick Timmins, Colorado Springs, Colo.
- Sgt. Nicholas Titman, Fort Carson, Colo.
- Sgt. Ricardo Villalobos, Winston Salem, N.C.■

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