



USSOCOM wins at the international 2016 Invictus Games

*Story/photos by Army Staff Sgt. Jerimiah Richardson
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The 2016 Invictus Games may have come to a close but the inspiration it gave for the athletes of USSOCOM will last a lifetime. The Invictus Games are a paralympic-like competition featuring men and women who have faced life-threatening and life-changing injuries while in military service to their countries.

“The competition has been fierce with performances of the highest international standard across a number of events,” said Britain’s Prince Henry of Wales, commonly referred to as Prince Harry and who was the catalyst for the Invictus Games foundation.

Fourteen nations participated in the games with over 500 military competitors who took part in ten categories of sport at Walt Disney World’s ESPN Wide World of Sports

in Orlando, Florida. USSOCOM service members competed in swimming, seated volleyball, wheelchair rugby, track and field events, para-cycling, archery, and rowing.

The word “Invictus” means “unconquered” and it embodies the warrior spirit of USSOCOM members who have suffered injury while in the line of duty. For many of them, just having the opportunity to compete here is a fulfillment of the long arduous road through rehabilitation to recovery.

“I lost a lot of friends after the war who were members of my group that shouldn’t be gone. They made it through (the war) only to not be able to deal with the tediousness of recovery,” said USSOCOM’s Army veteran Sgt. 1st Class Josh Lindstrom.

When dealing with the long road to recovery, paralympic-like competitions like the Invictus Games show



U.S. Team member Air Force Staff Sgt. Seastiana Lopez-Arellano rushes the goal line in an attempt to score while being sparring by an Australian veteran during the U.S. vs Australia wheel chair rugby match held at Invictus Games 2016 in Orlando, Florida, April 6.

how the power of sport can change mindsets.

“Sometimes they felt like the clouds were never going to part, but if they’d learn that they could just come out and play in the rain and shoot some arrows or participate in some other (sport) it could do so much for them,” said Lindstrom.

And for some injured service members, it gives a new focus.

“It gives you a sense of purpose, an objective and a mission that we at USSOCOM are used to. With the adaptive sports they give me something back in life to look forward to,” said USSOCOM Army veteran Sgt. 1st Class Sualauvi Tuimalealiifano.

Over the four days of games, USSOCOM athletes made

friends with service members from around the world and were pushed to their limits in competition. USSOCOM’s team did very well against that competition pulling in a total of 16 medals with 7 Bronze, 4 Silver and 5 Gold. But as Prince Harry said, “This was never about the medals.”

The Invictus Games highlighted the extreme debt owed to those who pay the price for serving their country and showed how inspiration can change any man or woman no matter their ailment.

Vice President Joe Biden remarked on the country’s debt to the competitors when speaking to the competitors, “You are defined by your courage and redeemed by your loyalty. You are the captain of your country’s soul,” said the vice president.



(Left) USSOCOM’s Team member Sgt. 1st Class Yancy Taylor dives in for the 50M breast stroke competition at Invictus Games 2016 held in Orlando, Florida, April 6. (Above) USSOCOM para-cycle team Maj. Ivan Castro and Master Sgt. Mark Vomund react to winning the silver medal in the blind tandem team time-trials at Invictus Games 2016 in Orlando, Florida, April 4. (Below) U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Israel Del Toro Jr. throws the winning standing Shot Put for the Gold medal at Invictus Games 2016 held in Orlando, Florida, April 5.

