

# Rising above: USSOCOM team rocks the 2016 DoD Warrior Games

By U.S. Army Sgt. Christopher Osburn  
 DOD Warrior Games Public Affairs

As the two weeks of the Warrior Games came to a close June 22, the final game for sitting volleyball marked the grand finale.

In an exciting finish, the United States Special Operations Command sitting volleyball team faced off against the U.S. Air Force team. Though USSOCOM was unable to earn the gold medal, they came away with the silver. The game was full of emotion and determination from both sides. The match was both a competitive spectacle and a battle of wills. The U.S. Air Force team eventually was able to claim victory.

The games up until the finale were all hard fought. All athletes walked away with their heads held high.

USSOCOM exceeded not only the crowd's expectations but also their own. Overall, the USSOCOM team earned dozens of team and individual medals, a most impressive feat.

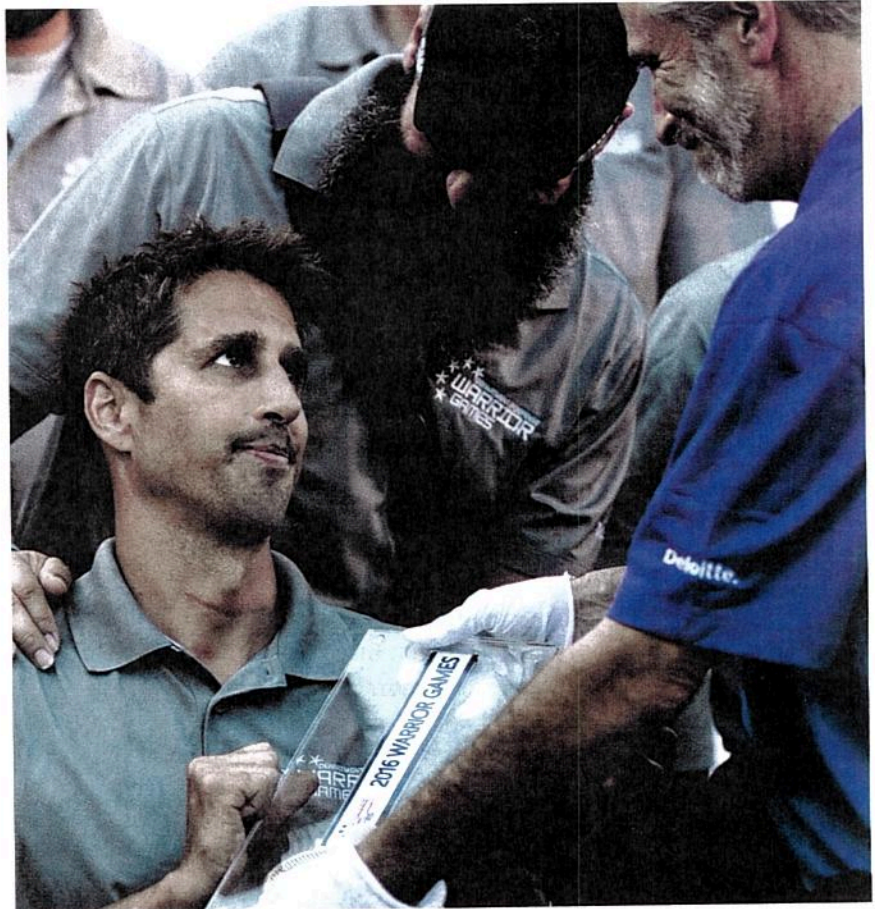
U.S. Army Veteran Sergeant 1st Class Fred Lewis was one of the key members of the volleyball team.

"After the initial victory, we woke up and realized that we actually had some talent, and rode that high till the very end," said Lewis.

The most rewarding aspect of the Warrior Games was the building of closeness and camaraderie. This was furthermore expressed by how well the USSOCOM Care Coalition had benefited the entire team. Something that none of the athletes had expected.

Lewis also encouraged other active and veteran wounded warriors to compete in the games or any other such events in the future.

"We (USSOCOM operators), as a population, tend



Navy veteran Lt. Ramesh Haytasingh of the Special Operations Command team accepts the Heart of the Team Award for the USSOCOM team from television and movie personality Jon Stewart during the 2016 Department of Defense Warrior Games closing ceremonies at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York June 21. Photo by E.J. Hersom.

to hide," said Lewis. "We should be getting involved to show other active-duty guys and veterans with disabilities that there is a lot more we can do than we think we can."

It is not only the athletes that are impacted by events like the Warrior Games, everyone involved is also impacted. This includes family members, volunteers, and anyone who worked at the games. It truly makes someone readjust his or her view on what makes a hero, and what it means to be a warrior.



# From enabler to competitor: One story from the 2016 Warrior Games

By U.S. Army Sgt. William J. Taylor  
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Constant change is a normal fact of life for U.S. service members. Whether from deployments, a cross-country change of assignment or the transition to civilian life, service members face many unexpected twists and turns. For U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mark Shrewsbury with U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), life has changed dramatically and unexpectedly in the past two years.

Shrewsbury was part of the USSOCOM 2015 Warrior Games support staff last year as a broadcast journalist; sharing the stories of many of the competitors he now calls teammates.

In June 2014, he was diagnosed with metastatic malignant melanoma. In January 2015, a few months before the Warrior Games, he found out that he had a brain tumor.

"The diagnosis hit me and my family pretty hard," said Shrewsbury. "At the time I was having to drive from my home in Panama City to Tampa for treatment, which is a six-hour drive."

Shrewsbury said he was in a bind with the drive until he was put into contact with Master Sgt. Johnny Moses, who was one of the Care Coalition representatives for USSOCOM.

"He was instrumental in getting my assignment to MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa," said Shrewsbury.

After transferring to MacDill AFB, Shrewsbury went through brain surgery at Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida and is now currently in remission.

He stated that being part of the Warrior Games support staff last year helped him realize all that the USSOCOM Care Coalition has to offer.

"Last year, I covered the Warrior Games as a public affairs broadcaster for USSOCOM, and it gave me the ability to have close coordination with the Care Coalition," said Shrewsbury. "This year I was honored to be asked to participate."

The USSOCOM Care Coalition also helped Shrewsbury prepare for the competition by providing him with a recumbent bike, as well as a compound bow to practice with

at home.

This year, Shrewsbury will compete in sitting volleyball, archery, cycling and swimming during the Warrior Games.

He said that the USSOCOM team has been less of a team and more like a family.

"They take care of you," said Shrewsbury. "You are not just a Soldier, you are a family member. It is a unique perspective, and to be welcomed like they have welcomed me has just been great. It helps me still be a part of the team."

A lot of the time, I have been down and out because of my treatment and getting to know them and getting advice for how they made it through rough times has helped," Shrewsbury said.

Shrewsbury recalled how working last year's Warrior Games was an enlightening experience.

"It is amazing how life changes," said Shrewsbury. "Last year I was interviewing warriors, and this year I am a warrior being interviewed."



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mark Shrewsbury, U.S. Special Operations Command, cycles past spectators during the recumbent bike event in the 2016 Department of Defense Warrior Games at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, June 18. The DoD Warrior Games is an adaptive sports competition for wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans. Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Tynisha Daniel.



# Special Forces athlete uses Warrior Games for new challenges

By Shannon Collins  
 DOD Warrior Games Public Affairs

Camaraderie and fellowship has been the highlight of the 2016 Department of Defense Warrior Games at the U.S. Military Academy, New York, for medically retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Sualauvi Tuimalealiifano.

About 250 wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans representing teams from the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force, U.S. Special Operations Command and United Kingdom armed forces are competing in shooting, archery, cycling, track and field, swimming, sitting volleyball and wheelchair basketball.

It was his first time racing in the wheelchair race, and he had limited practice in the special chair used for that type of racing.

"I was trying to get all the kinks out and learn the gears, but I'm excited about it," he said. "I'll just keep going from here and push to get it right."

## Injury

Tuimalealiifano joined the Army and served for 13 years as a civil affairs specialist. "I joined because I really wanted to serve my country," he said. "I really loved what the country is all about and the history of how we became [what we are]."

He served in Iraq from 2003 to 2004 and in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2007. While at Firebase Cobra, a remote outpost in south-central Afghanistan, Tuimalealiifano dealt with regular mortar attacks and fought in firefights. He said he's a jumpmaster and had been jumping out of airplanes for 13 years, so when he fell out of bed and hit a table trying to avoid a mortar attack, he didn't think too much of it at the time.

"We didn't know it at the time but I had fractured vertebrae from an area firefights," he said. The fall had exacerbated it. "We just kept going on and about three months later, throughout my time there, it had just been very painful. They didn't know exactly what it was. I just kept going on with the pain, through the pain. They were short manned on the base, and I stayed.

"It was hard for the choppers to get in, and our supply route was damaged," he continued. "There was a flood, and it ruined the bridge, so we had to try and take back a lot of the checkpoints and routes. I stayed with my boys."



*U.S. Special Operations Command veteran (right) Sualauvi Tuimalealiifano celebrates after the U.S. rugby team defeated Denmark to win the gold medal during the 2016 Invictus Warrior Games in Orlando, Florida, May 11. While competing in the 2016 Department of Defense Warrior Games at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York, Tuimalealiifano said adaptive sports have helped him bounce back from his injuries. Photo by Roger Wollenberg.*

He said if he had known just how injured he was, he would have left, but that he stayed for his team, even though the pain became severe. His spinal injury led to paraplegia and he uses a wheelchair for mobility.

## Warrior Games

Tuimalealiifano said training and competing in adaptive sports has been beneficial for him. "Adaptive sports have helped me do a lot of things," he added. "They've helped me progress. I got stronger, and that's what I'm doing still. I'm just getting stronger. It's been amazing."

This is his second Department of Defense Warrior Games, and he said he enjoys every minute of it.

"I love it, really, there are no words for it," he said. "I'm really excited to be part of the group and part of the event. The Warrior Games is very fulfilling for anybody, for any injury level, for any person to come out and still have something to look forward to. We come from an active lifestyle in the military. We always had a routine or an objective or mission. There was always something we were doing. Once we get out or we're injured, now we're dealing with our injury and trying to get back, and sometimes you miss the competition level of trying to get into the sports.

"This year's been great because not only have I been



competitive, but the camaraderie, meeting people -- I'm just really blessed to be part of the group and amongst the great men and women and a lot of great volunteers who help out," Tuimalealiifano said.

Tuimalealiifano said his family tries to come out and support him as much as they can, such as last year's DoD Warrior Games and at the Invictus Games last month in Orlando, Florida. His favorite sport is wheelchair rugby, he added, and he said it was an honor not only to represent the SOCOM team, but also to be part of Team USA.

"It was an amazing, awesome feeling I won't forget," he

said. "It was really good to represent the country as a whole. It was awesome being with the different nations with a great bunch of people."

Tuimalealiifano said he hopes to compete again at the Invictus Games and in other veteran competitions, and that he recommends the DoD Warrior Games to anyone considering trying out.

"Come out and check it out," he said. "There's a lot to offer for people with different injury levels, illnesses and injuries. There's a spot for anybody and everybody. Come be amongst the fellowship. It's a blessing."

# Wounded warrior to warrior angel

By U.S. Army Sgt. Brandon Rizzo  
DOD Warrior Games Public Affairs

"Winning is a byproduct," said Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Marr, a medically retired Special Forces combat engineer. "I always try to contribute and perform to the best of my abilities and by doing that, my hope is that it will inspire and encourage others to know that they can do the same."

Marr's journey toward becoming an inspiration to other wounded warriors began years ago when he suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) after receiving enemy 107mm rocket fire during a combat mission in Wardak Province, Afghanistan.

"I came back to and we were in a fight, so there wasn't really any time to think about it or talk about it," said Marr. "And it was just part of the job, so I didn't think much about it after that."

In addition to the rocket attack, Marr was continuously exposed to blast waves while performing his functions as a combat engineer.

"I was a breacher for our team. So, that means I put surgical explosive charges on denied points of entry," said Marr. "Being that my specialty was explosives, I was around countless explosions -- hundreds, if not thousands. Back then, we never made any correlation between head trauma and blast waves. It just wasn't a thing, nobody knew anything about it."

Eventually, the symptoms of his injury -- memory loss, vision issues, migraines, lost vocabulary, and depression -- led him to seek treatment for his TBI. During his journey, Marr says he crossed paths with a neuroendocrinologist who not only drastically helped improve his condition, but in doing so inspired him to try to help others with the same condition.

In March 2015, he created the Warrior Angels Foundation, an organization dedicated to raising funds for the



U.S. Army Veteran Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Marr of Argyle, Texas, practices throwing discus in preparation for competing in the 2016 DoD Warrior Games at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, June 12. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Brandon L. Rizzo.

treatment for the condition of TBIs as opposed to simply treating the symptoms. To date, they've helped treat 120 combat veterans with TBIs and post-traumatic stress symptoms.

One year after starting the foundation, Marr received a phone call from U.S. Special Operations Command, asking him to participate in the DoD Warrior Games.

"I saw a great opportunity to train for something, to compete for something, but under the banner of hopefully challenging and inspiring others that are in the same or similar positions," said Marr.

"It feels good to be competing in the games, because two years ago I had a difficult time -- I was having double vision, balance issues ... I was in bad shape, so performing at a high level, doing a rotational spin and throwing anything would have been out of the question. So to go from that physical and mental state to now being able to do at a competitive level, it is fulfilling."



# What it takes to field a team

*By Air Force Capt. Leslie Forshaw  
DOD Warrior Games Public Affairs*

The saying, “It takes a village,” is more than just a catchphrase at the 2016 Warrior Games, held at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, June 15 - 21. The campus is teeming with family members, coaches, support staff, volunteers and medical personnel, all working hard to manage the athletes’ individual needs as well as the logistics of ensuring the wounded, ill and injured athletes are able to make it to their next event.

Heading up the intricate network of details for U.S. Special Operations Command’s (USSOCOM) Care Coalition and Military Adaptive Sports Program (MASP) is Army Lt. Col. Theresa Lewis, chief of plans, policy and operations, and Army Master Sgt. Pat Gilmore, the manager for MASP.

Team SOCOM is competing against the four U.S. military branches and athletes from the United Kingdom, for gold, silver and bronze medals in eight sports: archery, cycling, track and field, sitting volleyball, shooting, swimming, and wheelchair basketball.

The job of the Care Coalition started long ago with getting the information out about SOCOM’s Warrior Care Program for those wounded, ill or injured service members and their families.

“From time of recovery the athlete goes into rehabilitation. This is where he or she gets involved with the MASP,” said Lewis. “Most are reintegrated back into service, but those who cannot continue to serve are transitioned to the Veterans Administration where they continue to receive some supportive service through the Care Coalition.”

Army Col. Cary Harbaugh, Director of USSOCOM’s Care Coalition Warrior Care Program, is also front and center during the games.

“The adaptive sports program, even though a small



*Team USSOCOM coach, U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Lita Bowling directs the team during sitting volleyball practice during the 2016 Department of Defense Warrior Games at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, June 20. The DoD Warrior Games is an adaptive sports competition for wounded, ill and injured service members and Veterans. Athletes representing teams from the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Special Operations Command and the United Kingdom Armed Forces compete in track, field, archery, cycling, shooting, swimming, sitting volleyball, and wheelchair basketball starting June 15. Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. William Taylor.*

part of the overarching care of the Care Coalition, is really important,” said Harbaugh. “The Care Coalition’s primary goal is for the service member to return to duty. We are using adaptive sports for rehabilitation from the onset.”

Once the athlete is ready and has gone through the week-long annual selection competition held each February, training then starts for the June Warrior Games. The athletes are handed over to Gilmore, Lewis and their team to get them ready to compete.

Athletes attend two training camps before the games and are issued the gear necessary for the sport in which they will compete. During the training camps, expert coaches are on-hand for the athletes.

Competing in the 2016 Warrior Games are 31 athletes from SOCOM’s Warrior Care Program and 25



dedicated Care Coalition adaptive sports staff.

These 25 people, comprised of personnel managers, equipment managers, medical staff, sports coordinators, operations and logistics coordinators other augmented staff such as public affairs, vehicle drivers and protocol specialists come in days prior to the start of the games.

"Some of the guys hauled in a 32-ft trailer packed nose-to-tail from USSOCOM's headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida," said Gilmore. "Then we unpack and set it all up about three days prior to the start of the games."

Then they make sure the equipment, like basketball wheelchairs, are accounted for and checked to make sure it's functioning before the events start, he said.

Another 'hat' the Care Coalition adaptive sports staff wears is that of a travel agent.

"About three months out from the games, we start coordinating all the hotel and travel reservations," said Gilmore. "Due to the vast array of wounds, illnesses or injuries the athletes have, their unique needs can determine the type of hotel accommodations needed."

Athletes still on active duty receive government funded orders from the military to participate. Expenses are provided by various benevolent groups. For the 2016 Warrior Games, the Wounded Warrior Project and Special Operations Forces Bionic Warrior Program Inc., are the benefactors for the athletes.

The 'little' details are just as important as the big ones: tables, chairs, Wi-Fi, computers, printers, office supplies, water, food, shirts for staff members are all set up and ready to go - down to purchasing sunscreen - is all a part of what it takes to set up.

"It's all a part of taking care of our wounded warriors," said Gilmore.

The medical component is critical to the care of the athletes. Most athletes need daily medication, have special needs or just require basic physical therapy. There are physical therapists on hand, medical doctors who can prescribe medication, nurses, medics and a clinic to nurse the bumps and bruises.

"Seeing the outcome and effect this program has on the service members' recovery is what makes me want to do this - and to continue doing this," said Lewis, who also serves as the medical lead for the Care Coalition adaptive sports staff.

Once the games officially start, it's game-on. Cell phones, walkie-talkies and radios chirp nonstop, keeping the team in constant communication as shuttle

buses start transporting athletes, family members, and staff to and from the various sporting events. Massage therapists are on hand for athletes' last-minute needs and medics are on scene at every event.

Each staff member is responsible for a different sport and the athletes and families who attend.

"They have to make sure all the athletes have what they need, when they need it, to include getting them to all the training sessions," said Gilmore. "Not to mention the staff is responsible for the resources at the event, like water and food."

At each event, family members, additional staff and leadership attend. It's loud, cheerful, competitive, fun, inspirational and invigorating.

"It's hard to describe unless you experience it," said Gilmore. "To see these wounded members able to achieve what they thought was impossible is hard to put into words. That's the whole thing with adaptive sports, it's a vehicle to wellness. The sense of being on a team together, the social aspect of that, and the informal peer mentorship is invaluable."

As the 2016 games draw to an end, the hard work of the Care Coalition continues on as they begin preparing for the 2017 Warrior Games in Chicago, Illinois.

"We literally have a wellness event next month. As soon as one game ends, we start planning the next," said Lewis.

A wellness event brings participants together in order to integrate with fellow wounded warriors through peer to peer mentorship and relationship building using sports such as sailing, skiing, snowboarding, golf and water sports as a reconditioning vehicle, said Gilmore.

"It's a lot of work, but it's awesome to see the growth of these participants and help in getting them to a better place," Gilmore said. "We are a family here. We get to know the family, their kids, and the details of each and every injury or illness."

From June through the next selection course in February, the staff and athletes will attend wellness and training events throughout the year.

The Care Coalition is one of five congressionally recognized Wounded Warrior Programs with a mission to provide wounded, ill and injured special operations forces service members and their families support to ensure they are receiving optimal care with the intent to return to Active Duty.