

# INVICTUS GAMES ATHLETE BIOGRAPHIES

## U.S. WOUNDED WARRIOR TEAM

### *Navy and Coast Guard Members*



**Jonathan Adviento**

**Navy Electrician's Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> Class**

**Age:** 29

**Current Command/Position:** Transient Personnel Unit, Puget Sound

**Current Hometown:** Silverdale, Wash.

**Disability:** Left arm injuries from accidental gunshot wound in 2013

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery, Cycling (Recumbent), and Sitting Volleyball

Adviento enlisted in the Navy on April 6, 2010. After boot camp, he completed naval nuclear power training, and he was subsequently assigned to USS Henry M. Jackson (Gold) (SSBN 730). He was very active, enjoying "wallyball" (volleyball in a racquetball court), ultimate Frisbee, and rifle and pistol shooting. Last March, while cleaning his gun after shooting practice, Adviento's left hand was severely injured when the gun accidentally discharged. Since his injury, Adviento has undergone multiple surgeries and taken part in occupational therapy to regain use of his hand and arm. His current prognosis indicates that, at best, he will recover only 70 percent functionality. He currently is pursuing an internship through Operation Warfighter, and staying active through adaptive athletics. His wife, Kaitlyn, currently is enrolled at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill and works for Autism Speaks, a national nonprofit organization. Adviento is extremely excited about participating in the INVICTUS Games, which is only his second – and his largest – adaptive athletics competition. "I love any opportunity to connect with other cultures and communities, and it's a personal goal to feel like a citizen of the world and not just an American," said Adviento.



**Angelo Anderson**

**Navy Hospital Corpsman 3<sup>rd</sup> Class**

**Age:** 25

**Current Command/Position:** Camp Lejeune

**Current Hometown:** Jacksonville, N.C.

**Disability:** Upper and lower extremity injuries sustained in combat in 2010

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Cycling, Track (800M, 1,500M, 100M Relay, 400M Relay), and Wheelchair Basketball

**Sports Highlights:** Silver and bronze medals at the 2011 Warrior Games; bronze medal at the 2013 Warrior Games

Anderson joined the Navy in 2007. He always had been interested in a medical profession, but achieving the necessary educational degrees would be time-consuming and expensive. Becoming a Navy hospital corpsman seemed like an ideal course of action. Anderson was injured during his first deployment; he was on patrol with Marines in Afghanistan when he sustained gunshot wounds to his right arm and thigh. He talked his comrades through his care while waiting to be evacuated by a helicopter. He considers himself fortunate to have survived the incident and credits it for changing his outlook on life. Anderson said: "I live life for what it is and to the fullest." Anderson has since returned to full duty and is working at the Marine Special Operations School at Camp Lejeune.



**Jim Castaneda**  
**Retired Navy Boatswain's Mate 1<sup>st</sup> Class**  
**Age:** 48  
**Current Command/Position:** Retired  
**Current Hometown:** San Antonio, Texas  
**Disability:** Stroke diagnosed in 2007  
**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery and Field (Javelin, Shot Put)  
**Non-medical Attendant:** Alona Castaneda

Castaneda joined the Navy in 1990 to see the world. Having grown up in El Paso, Texas, a very arid desert climate, he was drawn to the cool blue waters of the ocean and the promise of where they would take him. He did not join the Navy with the intention of making it his career, but stayed in the Navy because he enjoyed the tempo of military service, changing jobs every three years, meeting new people, and the challenges and rewards that come with a new position and new duty station. Early one morning in October 2007, Castaneda suffered a stroke during muster aboard USS Tortuga (LSD 46), while the ship was underway near the Philippines. Castaneda retired from the Navy after 20 years of service in September 2010. Castaneda continues to suffer seizures and uses a wheelchair; however, he remains very active in adaptive athletics. Castaneda said: "Everyone [competing in adaptive athletics] seems seven feet tall – larger than life. I feel like Superman. I can do anything now." Castaneda has a wife, Alona, who serves as his primary caregiver. Together, they have three children, Mariaa, Jim, and Jef.



**Steven Davis**  
**Retired Navy Aviation Electrician's Mate Apprentice**  
**Age:** 26  
**Current Command/Profession:** Retired  
**Current Hometown:** Salida, Calif.  
**Physical Disability:** Lower-body injury sustained in a 2008 motorcycle accident  
**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery, Sitting Volleyball, and Wheelchair Basketball  
**Sports Highlights:** Bronze medal at the 2013 Warrior Games

Davis joined the Navy shortly after high school; he wanted to travel and see the world. His father was a sonar technician, and Davis chose to join the aviation community as an electrician. Always athletic growing up, baseball was his favorite sport, but he also enjoyed basketball, football, and wrestling; his sports hero is basketball great Kobe Bryant. Once in his helicopter sea combat squadron (HSC 8), Davis tried out for All-Navy baseball, and he had made it through the second round when he had to withdraw due to deployment work-ups. When Davis' subsequent motorcycle accident in 2008 claimed the use of his right leg, he was told he would never walk again. Today, he walks with the aid of an ankle-foot orthosis and hardly has to use his wheelchair. He currently is practicing wheelchair basketball with the Sacramento Royals, a National Wheelchair Basketball Association team. Additionally, by the end of this year, or perhaps next year, he hopes to marry his girlfriend, Marcia Rodriguez. "Participating in the INVICTUS Games is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me. It's just one more step closer to my goal of competing in the Paralympics," said Davis.



### **ONE TO WATCH!**

**Ching Dressel**

**Navy Chief Career Counselor**

**Age:** 35

**Current Command/Profession:** Commander, SUBPAC, Force Career Counselor

**Current Hometown:** Pearl City, Hawaii

**Disability:** Myelodysplastic Syndrome, diagnosed in 2009

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Cycling, Rowing (1K, 2K), and Track (400M, 1,500M)

**Sports Highlights:** Completed the 2013 Army 10-miler and the 2013 Kauai Half Marathon

Raised in Sacramento, Calif., Dressel enlisted in the Navy in 1998. She wanted to see the world and, along the way, receive an education. Dressel's duty stations include USS Tarawa (LHA 1), San Diego, Calif.; Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS), Sacramento, Calif.; an Individual Augmentee deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2005 to 2006; Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Mobile Unit Six, Charleston, S.C.; and Helicopter Anti-Submarine Light (HSL) 37, Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, PCU Michael Murphy, Commander, US PACFLT and Commander, SUBPAC. She was diagnosed with Myelodysplastic Syndrome in June 2009; in February 2012, she received a bone marrow transplant. During her treatment, she was promoted to chief petty officer, and, since then, she has worked hard to remain on active duty. She currently is in remission. She is maintaining good health through athletics, and she credits sports for helping her reach this point in her recovery. Dressel participated in the 2013 Warrior Games, and while she did not take home a medal, she called it an amazing experience. She is married to Billy Dressel, who has been her rock throughout her recovery. "I'm truly honored, not only to be invited to the INVICTUS Games, but especially being a part of the Navy team representing the United States and the Navy is incredible," said Dressel.



**John Edmonston**

**Retired Navy Lieutenant**

**Age:** 35

**Current Command/Position:** Mechanical Engineer with the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard

**Current Hometown:** Bremerton, Wash.

**Disability:** Traumatic brain injury (TBI) sustained in a 2009 motorcycle accident

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Sitting Volleyball, Swimming (50M and 100M Breast, 50M and 100M Front Crawl, Relay), and Track (100M, 200M, Relay)

**Sports Highlights:** Gold and bronze medals at the 2011 Warrior Games; gold, silver, and bronze medals at 2012 Warrior Games; bronze medal at the 2013 Warrior Games

Edmonston joined the Navy while attending California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, Calif. He always had been interested in a military career, and when he heard about the Navy's nuclear engineering program, he was hooked. Edmonston calls completing Navy Nuclear Power Training one of the most challenging experiences of his life; he also found his subsequent work on USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74) one of the most rewarding. He enjoyed hockey, dirt biking, and volleyball, and his sports hero is Joe Montana – a great athlete and a good person. In 2009, while he was exiting the ferry from Seattle to Bremerton, Wash., he lost control of his motorcycle. He suffered a TBI; broke his arm, face and back; and sustained multiple other injuries. Edmonston medically retired from the Navy in 2011, and since then he has worked as a civilian employee for the Navy. "I have always been proud to serve my country, but because of all that I have been through and how the Navy has helped, I am even more proud to put on that red, white, and 'Navy' blue," said Edmonston. "To me, participating in the INVICTUS Games means representing the United States of America to the rest of the world in friendly competition. It means putting our best foot forward both physically and socially."



**Jacob Emmott**

**Retired Navy Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class**

**Age:** 25

**Current Command/Profession:** Retired

**Current Hometown:** Wakefield, R.I.

**Disability:** Gunshot wound to the head sustained in combat in 2010

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery, Swimming (50M and 100M Breast, 50M and 100M Front Crawl, Relay), and Sitting Volleyball

Emmott – "Doc Emmott" to his Marines – joined the Navy looking for some direction after high school. A year later, he was on deployment with the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment in Afghanistan when he sustained a gunshot wound to the head while providing medical assistance to two of his Marines. The bullet pierced his Kevlar helmet and, thankfully, just missed his carotid artery. He blacked out briefly, came to and continued to direct the treatment of the two men and himself. He was awarded the Silver Star in July 2011. Emmott retired from the Navy in January 2013, and he hopes to go back to school and perhaps pursue a career in the medical field. His recovery has been slow; in addition to suffering from migraines and chronic pain, he was hospitalized for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 2012. "The biggest thing these athletic events give me is a reason to do better. I can sit at home right now, hopped up on painkillers or just all around feeling sorry for myself. Instead, I am going after an obtainable challenge," said Emmott.



**Isaac Francois**

**Retired Navy Hospital Corpsman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class**

**Age:** 31

**Current Command/Profession:** Retired

**Current Hometown:** Kensington, Md.

**Disability:** PTSD and compartment syndrome in his legs

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery, Cycling, Field (Discus), and Track (100M)

**Sports Highlights:** Two soccer titles

Before his injury, Francois was an avid soccer player who enjoyed the sport whenever he could. He coached soccer for kids in Panama City Beach, Fla., and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. After a difficult combat deployment in Afghanistan in 2008 - where he carried heavy gear and equipment daily - Francois returned home with compartment syndrome in his legs, a painful condition that occurs when pressure in the muscles builds to dangerous levels. Though it went undiagnosed for years, he also had PTSD from his experiences in theater, where he was exposed to the injuries and deaths of some of his teammates. He underwent several surgeries on his legs during his subsequent deployment to Guantanamo Bay, but his condition continued to plague him. He was formally diagnosed with PTSD at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in 2012, and he medically retired from the Navy at the end of last year. He currently is applying for jobs, and he has some very promising leads. He is married to Wisline, and together they have a son, Jaden, and they are expecting another baby boy. "Participating in the INVICTUS Games is going to be a one-of-a-kind opportunity for me to compete against some of the best men and women representing so many different countries and military branches. It means a lot to me in terms of accomplishing something that I don't get to do every day," said Francois.



**ONE TO WATCH!**

**Jaime Garza**

**Retired Navy Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class**

**Age: 27**

**Current Command/Profession:** Student

**Current Hometown:** The Colony, Texas

**Disability:** TBI from a fast-roping accident in 2010

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery, Field (Discus, Javelin, Shot Put), Powerlifting, Wheelchair Basketball, and Wheelchair Rugby

In July 2010, while he was deployed to the Philippines, Garza was participating in a mission that involved fast-roping when he fell from a helicopter. He plummeted 60 feet and sustained multiple injuries, but he continued on. He had suffered a TBI from the accident, but he was not medically evacuated; he was diagnosed when he returned home and was treated for vestibular, memory, cognitive, and mental health. Garza was medically retired from the Navy earlier this year, and he currently is enrolled at the University of Northern Texas. He is interested in pursuing a career in the medical and intelligence field, and he has a wife, Brittney, and a son, Braedyn. He is new to adaptive athletics, and he is excited to participate in his first international competition.



**Maria Gomez-Mannix**

**Navy Lieutenant Commander**

**Age: 45**

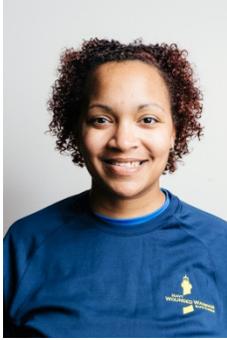
**Current Command/Profession:** Naval Sea Systems Command

**Current Hometown:** Escondido, Calif.

**Disability:** Breast cancer

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery, Cycling, Field (Discus, Javelin, Shot Put), Rowing (1K), and Sitting Volleyball

Gomez was a surface warfare officer assigned to Naval Undersea Warfare Center in San Diego when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in the fall of 2012. Initially, she thought she had a persistent case of the flu, but after visiting the doctor to treat the symptoms, it was discovered she had cancer. She underwent major surgery in January 2013 and commenced chemotherapy. After several months of treatment, tests thankfully indicated clear margins and lymph nodes. She is continuing reconstructive surgeries as she continues to heal. She is married to attorney Thomas Mannix, and she is enjoying new adaptive sports opportunities.



**Shericka Goza**

**Retired Sonar Technician (Surface) 2nd Class**

**Age:** 30

**Current Command/Profession:** Retired

**Current Hometown:** Hampton, Va.

**Disability:** Colon cancer, diagnosed March 2011

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery, Cycling, Field (Discus, Shot Put), and Rowing (1K, 2K)

Goza joined the Navy in March 2003 to serve her country and, eventually, pursue a college degree. Among her favorite tours was her assignment to USS Oscar Austin (DDG 79), when she was deployed to aid in the negotiation process for two vessels captured by pirates off the coast of Somalia. Later, she served a tour at Training Support Center Great Lakes, where she was a military training instructor and mentored students. During that tour, in March, 2011, Goza was diagnosed with Stage 4 metastatic colon cancer. Her recovery process has been slow, and, after multiple surgeries, she recently began her fifth round of chemotherapy treatment. Participating in adaptive sports has changed Goza's life, giving her a focus that does not include doctors or hospitals. Training and competing with Team Navy also connected her to new friends who can relate to her struggles and provide a special kind of support.



**Donald Jackson**

**Navy Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Aircraft Handler) 3<sup>rd</sup> Class**

**Age:** 22

**Current Command:** USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74)

**Current Hometown:** Kent, Wash.

**Disability:** Epiglottal cancer

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Field (Discus, Javelin, Shot Put), Powerlifting, Track (100M, 200M), Wheelchair Basketball, and Wheelchair Rugby

Jackson has long been a sports fan, and when he was assigned to the USS John C. Stennis, he was thrilled to make the cut for the command's flag football team. He also really enjoyed playing basketball, and his sports hero is Magic Johnson. Last fall, a biopsy confirmed that Jackson had epiglottal (throat) cancer. After completing intense medical treatments – during which he was grateful for support from his mother and brother – Jackson anticipates that he will be medically separated from the Navy. He landed an internship at the U.S. Coast Guard Base Seattle clinic, and he ultimately hopes to move to New Orleans. He is planning to pursue a career in law enforcement. He is new to adaptive athletics, and he is very eager to take part in the INVICTUS Games. At the Wounded Warrior Team Navy Trials, he asked the coaches: "How fast do I have to run to make the team for London?" When he made the INVICTUS Games team, he said: "It will be great to be around people like me with illnesses, injuries, or who were wounded in combat. I know we'll have fun, and it's an honor to be a part of something that means so much."



**Paul Johnson**

**Coast Guard Electrician's Mate 1st Class**

**Age:** 38

**Current Command/Profession:** Student

**Current Hometown:** Land O' Lakes, Fla.

**Disability:** TBI and PTSD, sustained after a shipboard accident

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery, Cycling (Recumbent), Field (Javelin), Rowing (1K, 2K), Swimming (50M and 100M Breast, 50M Front Crawl, Relay) and Wheelchair Rugby

A native of the U.K., Johnson married his wife Miranda in September 2000 after finishing college, and they decided to move to the U.S., where he would pursue a career in the financial industry. He was working in New York City during the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and in the aftermath of the tragedy he joined the U.S. Coast Guard. He served aboard myriad cutters – Forward, Midgett, Confidence, Bainbridge Island, and Venturous. He also was assigned to Sectors New York, New England, and St. Petersburg. Prior to his accident, Johnson played soccer and rugby and enjoyed swimming and cycling; his sports heroes are Thierry Henry and Bob Wilson, who played for the Arsenal Football Club. After an accident aboard one of his cutters and various experiences that occurred later, he was diagnosed with TBI and PTSD. He is very grateful for the strong support of his wife: “Miranda has been my rock through this process and without her I have no idea where I would be at this point.” Now retired, he is pursuing a Ph.D. in Instructional Design and Technology, and, ultimately he hopes to develop stronger training programs for others with TBIs and also teach. “The INVICTUS Games presents the opportunity to represent my new nation – I have only been a U.S. citizen for nine years – and to present to a wider audience what an injured service member or veteran can still do. I hope to inspire more wounded service members to take up rehabilitative athletics,” said Johnson.



**John Kremer**

**Retired Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician 1<sup>st</sup> Class**

**Age:** 31

**Current Command/Position:** Retired

**Current Hometown:** Buford, Ga.

**Disability:** Below-the-knee amputee (left and right legs), wounded in combat in 2010

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Sitting Volleyball and Wheelchair Basketball

**Sports Highlights:** Gold and silver medals at the 2012 Warrior Games; gold and bronze medals at the 2013 Warrior Games

Kremer grew up on Whidbey Island – which is home to a large naval air station – and sometimes would hop on his bike with friends to watch Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician (EOD) Sailors train. He would hear explosions and see the service members parachute into the water, and he was hooked; he knew he wanted to join the Navy one day. Kremer enlisted in 2003, about a year after he graduated high school. After multiple tours, he was injured while deployed with EOD Mobile Unit 1 in September 2010, after stepping on a land mine. He lost his right foot and part of his left foot, and he suffered additional shrapnel injuries. Kremer always has been active in sports – before his injury, he enjoyed wrestling – and adaptive athletics has been critical to his recovery. He currently is trying to earn a spot on the U.S. Paralympic Biathlon team. He is married to Gabrielle, and they have a daughter, Adalyn. Kremer said: “I think that to be part of the first INVICTUS Games is awesome, and I can’t wait.”



**Sonny Lemerande**

**Retired Navy Hospital Corpsman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class**

**Age:** 30

**Current Command/Position:** Student

**Current Hometown:** Twentynine Palms, Calif.

**Disability:** Lower-body injury and PTSD sustained in combat in 2009

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Field (Discus, Shot Put), Sitting Volleyball, and Wheelchair Basketball

**Sports Highlights:** Bronze medal at the 2013 Warrior Games

Lemerande grew up in Michigan, and he joined the Navy after high school. Because of his interest in the medical field, as well as the influence of a family member serving as a medic in the Air Force, he decided to enlist as a Navy Corpsman. Before his injury, he enjoyed basketball, football, volleyball, and baseball; his sports hero is football great Emmitt Smith. Lemerande went on two deployments during his more than nine-year naval career; it was during his second deployment that his Humvee was struck by a pressure plate anti-tank mine. Lemerande's injuries haven't slowed him down. He finished his military career in Twentynine Palms, Calif., where he worked as assistant leading petty officer and mentored junior Sailors. Now retired, he is attending school to become a social worker. He is the proud father of two daughters, McKenna and Jacqueline. "The INVICTUS Games is a great opportunity for me to represent the Navy and my country. It's my first international competition, and I'm honored to have been chosen to be a part of this amazing event," said Lemerande.



***ONE TO WATCH!***

**Stephen Miller**

**Retired Navy Aviation Boatswain's Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> Class**

**Age:** 33

**Current Command/Position:** Retired

**Current Hometown:** Cleveland, Ohio

**Disability:** Invisible wounds

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Cycling, Rowing (2K), Sitting Volleyball, Swimming (50M Front Crawl), and Track (400M, 800M, 1,500M)

**Sports Highlights:** Bronze medal at the 2013 Warrior Games

From Lakewood, Ohio, Miller grew up running and competed in high school track and cross-country. He joined the Navy as an aviation boatswain mate, serving tours on USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), USS Tarawa (LHA 1), and USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75). During his second enlistment, he became seriously ill with various cognitive disorders. He is now medically retired and training his heart out for the 2014 INVICTUS Games and Warrior Games, hoping to "glorify the Lord in all that I do."



**Brett Parks**

**Retired Naval Aircrewman**

**Age:** 35

**Current Command/Position:** National motivational speaker

**Current Hometown:** Jacksonville, Fla.

**Disability:** Lower-leg amputee and other injuries sustained after a gunshot wound in 2012

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Archery, Field (Discus, Shot Put), Sitting Volleyball, and Swimming (50M and 100M Front Crawl, 50M Back Stroke, Relay)

**Sports Highlights:** Two-time outstanding wide receiver at Miami Palmetto Senior High School; awarded a football scholarship at Carson Newman College; won the national championship for sitting volleyball at the "USA Volleyball Open Nationals" in

Phoenix, Ariz., as a member of the USA Sitting Volleyball A2 team

While training to become an aviation flight engineer, Parks was wounded in 2012 in Jacksonville, Fla. when he came to the aid of a man being robbed at gunpoint. Parks – a husband and father with a second child on the way -- was waiting to conduct a training session at his gym when he heard a man scream behind the fitness center and decided to intervene. Two gunshots were fired at Parks; the first shot hit his abdomen, but the second shot missed. The bullet shredded his kidney, severely damaged a third of his colon and severed a major artery, disrupting blood flow to his right leg. While in a coma for 20 days, his lower right leg was amputated, and Parks spent four months recovering from his wounds and learning how to use a prosthetic limb. In addition to his athletic ambitions, Parks has written a yet-unpublished book about his experiences titled "Miracle Man: A Bullet That Ignited a Purpose Driven Life." Parks also has established an organization called Second Shot Ministry, which enables him to share his faith and journey to recovery. He serves as a motivational speaker and travels the nation, speaking at schools, churches, and companies.



**Redmond Ramos**

**Navy Hospital Corpsman 3<sup>rd</sup> Class**

**Age:** 25

**Current Command/Position:** The Elizabeth Hospice

**Current Hometown:** Murrieta, Calif.

**Disability:** Below-the-knee amputee (left leg), wounded in combat in 2011

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Field (Discus), Sitting Volleyball, Swimming (50M and 100M Front Crawl, 50M Back Stroke), and Track (100M, 200M)

**Sports Highlights:** Gold, silver, and bronze medals at the 2012 Warrior Games

In 2007, ten days after graduating high school, Ramos decided to follow in his older brothers' footsteps and join the Navy to serve as a corpsman. In March 2011, Ramos was wounded in Helmand Province in Afghanistan while serving with the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment. His left leg was badly injured by an improvised explosive device while he was running to render care to an injured Marine. He was sent to Naval Medical Center San Diego, and – despite efforts during the following months to salvage the limb – it ultimately was amputated below the knee. Ramos was medically separated from the Navy in April 2013, but he remains very active in adaptive athletics events. He currently works in military combat training.



**ONE TO WATCH!**

**Javier D. Rodriguez Santiago**  
**Retired Navy Chief Yeoman**

**Age:** 33

**Current Command/Position:** Naval Medical Center San Diego/retirement process

**Current Hometown:** San Diego, Calif.

**Disability:** Above-the-knee amputee (left leg), injured in a 2011 motorcycle accident

**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Cycling (Handcycle), Field (Discus), Sitting Volleyball, and Wheelchair Basketball

**Sports Highlights:** NMCSD Wolfpack (wheelchair basketball team) placed second last season out of more than 80 teams in the nation in the NWBA Division III;

trophies in waveski surfing in Hawaii

Born and raised in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, Rodriguez Santiago enlisted in the Navy in 2002 wanting to serve his country while exploring the world. His duty stations included USS Montpelier (SSN 765) in Norfolk, Va.; the Navy Officer Recruiting Station in San Juan, Puerto Rico; an Individual Augmentee deployment to Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; USS North Carolina (SSN 777) in Groton, Conn., and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam; and Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCSD). Prior to his injury, Rodriguez Santiago enjoyed basketball and, when he had the time to play, beach volleyball. A victim of a hit-and-run accident while riding his motorcycle in January 2011, he sustained severe trauma to his lower extremities. Since then, he has battled through extensive surgeries and physical therapy, and, ultimately, he had his left leg amputated above the knee. After the surgery, Rodriguez Santiago has been more mobile, and he currently plays wheelchair basketball with the NMCSD team, the Wolfpack. He is married to Edna, and he has a son, Eddier, and a daughter, Aulani. "I'm proud of being selected to represent the wounded warrior from the U.S. military services. I'm honored to compete against wounded service members from other countries at the INVICTUS Games, and to learn how they've dealt with and are overcoming injuries or illnesses," Rodriguez Santiago said.



**ONE TO WATCH!**

**Max Rohn**  
**Retired Navy Hospital Corpsman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class**

**Age:** 27

**Current Command/Position:** Student

**Current Hometown:** Longmont, Colo.

**Disability:** Below-the-knee amputee (right leg), wounded in combat in 2009

**Sports:** Field (Discus, Shot Put) and Sitting Volleyball

**Sport Highlights:** Multiple gold, silver and bronze medals at the Warrior Games; made the U.S. Paralympics Track & Field National Team for shot put in the summer of 2013

Rohn joined the Navy simply because he knew he could help. After graduating from high school, he earned his emergency medical technician certification and had been volunteering as a firefighter in Colorado. Through his passion for the medical field, he found his calling as a Navy corpsman serving with Marine Corps units. In January 2009, he was serving with a Marine police transition team in Iraq when his Humvee was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade. He underwent 14 surgeries on his right leg during more than two years to try to salvage his limb. He attended the Warrior Games in 2011, and it changed his life. After seeing other wounded warriors accomplish incredible feats on the playing field, he decided to have his right leg amputated below the knee later that year. Since then, Rohn's physical and emotional health has improved dramatically, and he has redoubled his efforts in sports. Now retired from military service, he is attending Penn State University and competing internationally through the school's ability athletics program. A seasoned athlete who has attended three consecutive Warrior Games, Rohn mentors other wounded warrior athletes and remains an avid supporter of Team Navy. He made the U.S. Paralympics Track & Field National Team for shot put in the summer of 2013, and he hopes to compete for Team USA at the IPC Athletics World Championships in Doha, Qatar, in November 2015.



**Laura Root**  
**Retired Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade**  
**Age:** 35  
**Current Command/Position:** Retired  
**Current Hometown:** Cleveland, Ohio  
**Disability:** Muscular Dystrophy diagnosed in 2011  
**Sports:** Cycling, Rowing (2K), and Sitting Volleyball  
**Sports Highlights:** Gold medal at the 2013 Warrior Games

After several years of international experiences, Root joined the Navy because she had a passion for intelligence and languages. She was commissioned in February 2011 through Officer Candidate School in Newport, R.I., and has served in both the Office of Naval Intelligence and Defense Intelligence Agency. She earned her master's degree in International Relations from the American University of Paris, speaks both French and Turkish, and hopes to expand her portfolio. Despite being diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy in 2011, she has enjoyed adaptive sports and is working hard to advance to both national and international competitions. At the 2013 Warrior Games, Root became the first female ever to earn a gold medal in a shooting event (she took top honors in the air rifle prone competition). Now retired, Root is pursuing a civilian career and planning to start a blog and author a book about the network of wounded warriors in the U.S. and their experiences.



**Hector Varela**  
**Retired Navy Chief Gunner's Mate**  
**Age:** 45  
**Current Command/Position:** Retired  
**Current Hometown:** San Diego, Calif.  
**Disability:** Above-the-knee amputee (left leg), injured in a 2012 motorcycle accident  
**INVICTUS Games Sports:** Cycling (Handcycle), Field (Discus, Shot Put), Sitting volleyball, Wheelchair Basketball, and Wheelchair Rugby  
**Sports Highlights:** Bronze medal at the 2013 Warrior Games

Varela joined the Navy in April 1988; he wanted to leave the small farm town where he grew up and see the world. He is very proud of his many career achievements – particularly being promoted to chief petty officer – as a result of all his hard work. He has long been active in sports, and he especially enjoyed soccer softball and basketball when he was younger. His sports hero is Muhammad Ali. He was injured in February 2012 in a motorcycle accident, which resulted in the amputation of his left leg above the knee. Since his injury, he has enjoyed playing wheelchair basketball and participating in adaptive surfing. Now retired, he hopes to pursue a position within preventive medicine to aide others in recovering from physical injuries. He has a wife, Anna, and two daughters, Ashley and Amanda. “The INVICTUS Games are a world-stage event that supports injured service members and veterans, and it allows us to continue living and competing. It is an honor to be invited, and I am thankful to Prince Harry and the people of the U.K.,” said Varela.