

Commander Stakes builds teamwork, comradeship

By Jeff Troth MEDDAC PAO



Throughout the Army units set aside a day, or even a whole week each year to compete among themselves for bragging rights. The Fort Carson Warrior Transition Battalion is no different with its Commander Stakes, held 2 to 5 February. But while Soldiers in operational units conduct their sport weeks on their feet to demonstrate their mobility, WTB Soldiers showed which company was the best while sitting down.

“The Commander Stakes has several purposes,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Cole, the WTB’s senior noncommissioned officer. “Besides building comradeship, it also helps in the rehabilitation and recovery of our Soldiers.”

The WTB mission is to take care of wounded, ill or injured Soldiers who require at least six months of rehabilitative care and complex medical management. While assigned to the WTB these Soldiers are able to concentrate on medical appointments and transitioning to civilian life, or on returning to their original unit.

One of the tools the WTB uses to get Soldiers “back in the fight” is adaptive sports. This takes an activity such as volleyball and changes the game so that everyone can compete. Most of the 18 events were adaptive and included archery, cycling, swimming, sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball, and track and field.

“We use adaptive sports because the Warrior Transition Battalion is a medical unit and not everyone is completely able bodied, so these sports are for any type of disability or ability,” said Becky Richardson, the WTB’s Adaptive Sports Coordinator. “It opens up the Soldiers’ eyes to other opportunities. Sometimes they may think ‘I can’t play regular basketball, so therefore I can’t do anything.’ They may not be able to do standing basketball, but you can do wheelchair basketball.”

This same philosophy is carried over into volleyball, hockey, track and cycling.

“With most of our events the Soldiers were able to still participate even if they have a lower body injury or mobility issue,” said Cole. “They are able to participate in these sports against able-bodied folks on an even field.”

The WTB’s Commander Stakes brought together not only active duty wounded, ill or injured Soldiers, but also unit cadre and veterans, and also served to identify potential participants for the Department of Defense Warrior Games, which will be held at Quantico, Virginia, in June.

For the track and field events, the WTB used the Air Force Academy's indoor field house and changed the competition up a bit.

"We did two types of races; one was running standing up and the second was using a racing wheelchair," Cole said. "We have a couple specialized wheelchairs so that folks that can't run can still participate; we had able-bodied people also get in them and race. Going 800 meters using only your arms is a heck of a workout."

According to Cole, some of the most popular and exciting events of the Commander Stakes were the sled hockey matches, which took place at the Sertich Ice Center in Memorial Park. The rules were the same as regular hockey, but the participants were on sleds, and used two short hockey sticks to propel themselves across the ice and to control the puck.

"The sled hockey is probably my favorite out of all the sports that we did this week," said Sgt. Brad Sollis, who has almost completed his recover for a herniated disc in his back and will soon return to his unit in Salt Lake City. "I like it because it is something different, that not everyone gets to do. Being strapped in the sled gives you the perspective of what other Soldiers go through that are injured."

While all participants, injured and able-bodied, got a new perspective on sports, Company A also earned bragging rights for the year as the winners of the Commander Stakes.

"Adaptive sports and the Commander Stakes broaden the Soldiers' horizons and let them see that it isn't about what they can't do but what they want to do," said Richardson. "We just have to figure how to make it possible so that they can do it."



During a Commander Stakes sitting volleyball match, WTB Soldiers stretch for the ball as they fight for points. (Photo by Jeff Troth)



The Warrior Transition Battalion Commander Stakes offers Soldiers and cadre a different mode of motion on the ice during sled hockey. (Photo by Jeff Troth)