

## THE ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HIGH LEVEL SPORT IN THE UNITED STATES

*MS. Paulette FREESE, United States*



The United States faces many challenges in providing an environment which allows opportunities for military athletes to train for elite level competitions.

The United States has five military branches: Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard. Each service has a Reserve component, and to complicate matters even more, the Army and Air Force also have National Guard units, which per the constitution fall under the purview of the individual states, not the Federal Government.

Each branch of the United States' military has a slightly different design and structure supporting our top athletes. Factors which affect each Service's structure include the number of available military athletes, funding required to support these athletes, and mission requirements. The Army, which is the largest service branch, has the largest WCAP program, and consequently, we have historically had the best results placing soldiers on the U.S. Olympic team.

There are many factors which determine what and how a country develops and structures its program. Some countries have the luxury of state-subsidies for their Olympic programs. The United States does not, which adds yet another challenge to the support of our athletes.

The basis for the U.S. Military elite sports program is a federal law, which was passed in 1948, which authorized "Armed Forces personnel to train for, attend and participate in Pan American, Olympic Games, and certain other international amateur sports events". The bill also authorizes the use of Appropriated (tax-generated) funding to support this effort. Each year since, this initiative is included as part of the legislation incorporated into the defense bill.

Both the Army and the Air Force have formal "World Class Athlete Programs (WCAP)." Soldiers selected for the Army program are assigned to the WCAP Detachment. The WCAP Detachment is located at Ft. Carson, Colorado, which is a few miles away from the United States Olympic Training Center. The Air Force program assigns airmen to units that are co-located with regional or national training sites. The Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard have smaller programs that allow sailors, marines, and coast guardsmen that place soldiers in areas that allow them to train in their sport while maintaining their military occupations.

All of the military sports programs are managed from the Services' Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs. The same agencies are responsible for recreational sports and fitness programs.

In all cases, the individual athletes must apply for acceptance to the Service elite sports program. When we receive applications, we check to ensure that the individual does have the potential to make the U.S. Olympic team. The entry standards vary from sport to sport, but in the majority of the sports, a high national ranking, or a place on the U.S. National team is a basic requirement.

We also conduct a background check regarding the individual's military standing to ensure that there have been no lapses in military discipline, and that the athlete has maintained all required military training.

Military athletes are accepted into the Service WCAP's for a period of one to three years leading up to the Olympic Games (summer or winter). After the Olympics, the majority of military athletes return to normal duties in their military occupations.

Participants in all the Services' WCAP programs balance their athletic training with their military career requirements. They must maintain military occupational skills, attend college or university classes, and are expected to represent the Armed Forces in an exemplary manner. If there is a conflict or contingency requiring their military skills, they can be returned to another military unit and deploy as necessary.

Our military athletes also support the Services' recruiting mission by conducting clinics and making appearances at high schools and colleges. By doing so, they provide positive role models for peer groups and youth while enhancing the public's pride in America's Armed Forces.

Through funding provided by their Service branch, military athletes receive the best possible coaching, access to training venues, state-of-the-art sports medicine, as well as opportunities to participate in top national and international competitions including the Goodwill Games, the Pan American Games, and national governing body amateur championships.

The military athletes benefit the Armed Forces by reinforcing a positive image of the Armed Forces; provide military athletes with national visibility; recognize outstanding military athletes, and establish a standard of excellence that all members of the Armed Forces can strive for.

In addition to the Olympics-targeted programs, the United States also conducts Armed Forces (Inter-Service) Championships in eighteen different sports. This serves as the selection process to send the best consolidated team to represent the United States at U.S. National Championships and CISM Championships.

Members of the Armed Forces have competed in the Olympics since before World War I - in 1912, Second Lieutenant George S. Patton competed in modern pentathlon and placed fifth. Since 1948, 541 Military Olympians have captured 131 medals in a variety of sports from hockey to track and field, rowing and shooting to boxing. Of the 131, 126 were won during the Summer Olympics.

Winter Games: In 2002, Spc. Jill Bakken and her civilian teammate, Vonetta Flowers, won gold in the first-ever Olympic women's bobsled event. In the men's 4-man race, Army Reservist 2nd

Lt. Garrett Hines won silver on the USA I bobsled, and three Soldiers in the USA II bobsled driven by Brian Shimer took the bronze, breaking a 46-year medal drought for America in that sport. Until 2002, the only medals Soldiers won at the Winter Olympics were in ice hockey: 1956 - silver, 1960- gold and 1972- silver. In 1994, five Soldiers were on the men's and women's biathlon teams that competed at the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway. At the 1998 Winter Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan, eight Army World Class Athletes competed: three bobsledders and five biathletes. There were no medalists; the fourman bobsled team missed a bronze medal by .02 of a second.

Summer Games: Twenty-two members of the Armed Forces earned spaces on the 2004 U.S. Olympic team. Highest finish was a silver medal in Shooting. Military athletes competed in Shooting, Rowing, Fencing, Racewalking, Marathon, Wrestling and Modern Pentathlon. Additionally, the U.S. coaches for Boxing, Wrestling, and Rifle Shooting were all members of the U.S. Military. One member of the Armed Forces competed in the Paralympics in several track and field events.

Eighty-two percent of the funding for Armed Forces Programs is from sources other than taxpayer dollars. Annual taxpayer expense is less than \$3 Million for this program.