Bringing home the gold

Marine veteran Travis Dodson attends veterans winter sports clinic after winning sled-hockey gold in PyeongChang

On Valentine’s Day 2007, Travis Dodson was deployed to Iraq. He was upstairs in a building serving as a temporary outpost when a grenade was thrown through a second story window. Dodson lost both legs in the attack.

Worse still, he also lost his friend, Lance Cpl. Daniel Morris.

Under these circumstances, it would be easy to give up. But Dodson was never a quitter. His perseverance continued as he traveled the road to recovery.

“In the Marine Corps we did PT [physical training] all the time. Then suddenly you get injured and you do your rehab, but you also sit around while. But that makes you feel crappy,” explained Dodson. “It gave me the drive to want to work out again. The rehab center did a great job introducing me to adaptive sports—basketball, tennis, softball, wheelchair racing and Nordic skiing.”

His Nordic ski coaches encouraged him to attend a training camp. Dodson found the sport physically demanding and enjoyed the opportunity to expend energy. He kept training, and eventually hard work paid off.
Dodson represented Team USA in the 2014 Paralympic Games in Sochi on the Nordic ski team where he became captivated by sled hockey. Back home, he transitioned his training to the ice.

During the 2017 to 2018 season, Dodson played 11 games, scored one goal and had two assists. He played in the World Sled Hockey Challenge and just this month took home gold as a member of the Team USA sled hockey team at the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Winter Games.

But it was never about the medals or points for Dodson.

“To me it was about the team. Everyone is working hard and you don’t want to let them down,” explained the forward. “I trained hard to be as good as I could be, and I did it for the guys around me.”

Just a few weeks after his team’s Paralympic victory in South Korea, Dodson will attend the DAV and VA co-hosted National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. The Team USA National Sled Team doctor, Mike Uihlein serves as a physician at the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee and told Dodson about the event. The first time participant says although sled hockey is his favorite of all sports taking place during the clinic, he is most looking forward to downhill skiing and working his way up through the more challenging slopes.

The two-time Paralympian has advice for fellow veterans who
may be apprehensive about attempting adaptive sports.

“Just try it. When people first wanted me to try wheelchair basketball. I said no initially because I used to play ‘real’ basketball,” said Dodson. “It’s easy to initially have that mindset that adaptive sports are less than the able-bodied equivalent until you try them and then you realize they are great, challenging and a lot of fun.

“You won’t like every sport, there’s some I don’t enjoy as much, but you won’t know which you really like until you try.”

**About the event:** Co-hosted by DAV and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic promotes sports therapy and rehabilitation through adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing, rock climbing, wheelchair self-defense, sled hockey, scuba diving and other adaptive sports and activities. The five day event in Snowmass, Colorado is a world leader in adaptive winter sports instruction for ill and injured Veterans and their families. Be inspired at wintersportsclinic.org.