



MARIO RODRIGUEZ AND DARRYL WEISS FENCE A DIRECT ELIMINATION BOUT. PHOTO BY HEIDI RUNYAN.

## Wheels West

Bladerunner is the San Diego Division's premier tournament each year. This year's event, held November 3-4 in conjunction with the University of California-San Diego's fencing team, was no exception. The tournament attracts more than 100 fencers from both in and out of California. However, this year, for the first time, wheelchair events were added as well as a clinic to introduce wheelchair fencing to the community.

"There is a dearth of wheelchair fencers in San Diego," says Darryl Weiss, the coordinator of the wheelchair event and a wheelchair fencer himself. "Ever since I had my health issues and became a 'wheelie' [one of the nicknames for a wheelchair fencer] I've been pushing for more interest and participation in the sport."

In August of 2011 fencers Rocky Herron, Darryl Weiss and Maestro Stuart Lee approached Naval Medical Center San Diego (known locally as Balboa Hospital) with the intention of providing a demonstration of and free wheelchair fencing instruction to severely wounded combat veterans attempting to recover from their service injuries. Wheelchair fencing had proven instrumental in Weiss' recovery from debilitating brain injuries. The experiment at Balboa was a tremendous success. The reaction from the Wounded Warriors was cause for the formation of Combat Arms Fencing, a club originally founded for support to veterans but soon also to be expanded to include any fencer who needs a wheelchair to fence. One competitor in epee and saber came from the club. He is a veteran and a triple amputee.

"While I was hoping for more wheelies to come, I am guessing that with the Crescent City Open last week in New Orleans, and the NAC in Milwaukee next month and this event being added at the last minute, perhaps fencers had not been able to fit this into their budget," says Weiss. "The setup, execution and timing of the events went smoothly. The UCSD head coach even told me that a number of his fencers had come up to him and expressed how cool the events were and that some of them didn't even know there was wheelchair fencing."

Weiss said that he and the event organizers are looking forward to holding new wheelchair fencing events in the future and hope to use tournaments and clinics to help grow the sport in Southern California.

For more information on how you can be involved in wheelchair fencing in the San Diego area, visit [www.combatarmsfencing.org](http://www.combatarmsfencing.org).

-AF