

# New Legs Propel Vets to Active Sports Life

## Softball News Report

**T**he idea, with deep roots of hope and determination, emerged from the smoke and carnage of the battlefields of war-torn Iraq and Afghanistan.

And it was beautifully simple: David Van Sleet wanted to give combat veterans who lost limbs the opportunity to play ball again.

Since 2011, when Van Sleet launched the Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team, more than 50 combat veterans who lost limbs have competed – some at a high level.

As the creator and founder of the Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team (WWAST), Van Sleet served as the team's head coach, general manager and chief executive officer from 2011 to 2015.

He later served as the general manager of the Louisville Slugger Warriors Softball Tournament Team from 2016-17, and most recently in 2018, Van Sleet was named general manager of the Louisville Slugger Warriors Amputee Baseball Team.

"I possessed the four pieces to the puzzle," said Van Sleet, regarding the creation of the amputee team. "US Army Veteran; prosthetic education; employed



David Van Sleet speaking during the awards banquet at the 2018 SSUSA Tournament of Champions (TOC).

by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and played, coached and managed softball teams for over 40 years."

"I saw the amputees coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan and the idea was formulated. I have introduced over 50 amputee veterans and active duty personnel to the game of softball."

Van Sleet, an Army veteran who served in the Vietnam era, worked in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the field of Prosthetics for 30 years in both clinical and administrative roles, before retiring in 2011.

In 1996, Van Sleet was selected and honored as the VA Prosthetic Chief of the Year. At the height of both the Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom) and Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) Wars, Van Sleet served as the VA Prosthetics Manager of New England and then Southwest.

In 2013, the Military Order of the Purple Heart presented Van Sleet with its highest award, the George Washington Medallion of Merit Award for his work developing the program.

In 2011, Van Sleet was awarded the VA's highest award, the prestigious Olin E. Teague Award that recognizes an employee with the VA whose achievements have been extraordinarily beneficial to the rehabilitation of war-injured veterans.

As more and more amputees join teams and compete, advancing technology is helping them play at higher and higher levels.

Among the 50 amputee veterans and active duty personnel that have played for Van Sleet is Carlo Adame, U.S. Army Sergeant First Class (Ret.).

Adame, a second baseman on the LS Warriors, has been a benefactor of the technological advancements in prosthetics. Adame, a right side BKA (Below



Photo Courtesy of David Van Sleet  
**Carlo Adame of the Louisville Slugger Warriors.**

Knee Amputation), recently received a new prosthetic built by Greg Davidson, Certified Prosthetist Orthotist (CPO) and founder of Davidson Prosthetics.

Adame, now retired from the military and a service-connected veteran, served four tours in Iraq, but suffered an amputation of his right lower leg in a non-combat injury while still in the service.

"The increased rear curve produces more dynamic movement of the spring when running or doing high impact sports," said Davidson in describing the prosthetic (see picture on next page).

"It looks wild, but walks extremely well and is amazing for baseball! He (Carlo) prefers to not use it in a shoe, so I installed mountain bike tire for tread, and showed him how to re-tread it so he can keep the tread in good shape. He plans to

# Prosthetics: New Models Next Best Thing to Real Leg

use it for everyday activity and softball/baseball.”

“The performance of the newest design is amazing!” said Adame. “With this model, my agility is better than ever. It’s the next best thing to a real leg. Right now, I’m just seriously wowed by how awesome this prosthetic is. With this leg, I can pivot better than ever.”

“It is ridiculous how comfortable and effortless it is in my ability to stop fast and then take off in a full sprint. I have the running/sprinting ability of the running leg, but it's also very comfortable to walk in, which is huge if you're an athletic person into intense sports.”

Davidson takes great pride in doing his own fabrication work, which he says is rare in the industry, but a tremendous advantage to his patients.

“I have pioneered and developed a new prosthetic foot concept that represents a significant advancement in prosthetic technology,” said Davidson. “It is an effort to maximize the carbon spring length in prosthetic design, resulting in an extremely energetic, lightweight, dynamic feel when walking. I shared my findings with the Ossur company, which lead to the creation of a product called the Cheetah Xplore. I have had astonishing success with this extraordinary concept, and have seen it change lives

and improve function for so many amputees. With this design, you will be able to walk easier, faster, further, work harder, and enjoy high-impact sports including running.”

“I have developed new ways to implement flexible materials and strategic cushioning in all types of prosthetic sockets,” continued Davidson. “This greatly improves socket comfort, and has allowed me to resolve chronic fitting problems with many of my amputees. Once I get a perfect fit in a hard test socket, building the finished carbon fiber socket with the flexible, cushioned inner socket greatly enhances the comfort and function of my amputees, and allows me to easily perform shape and volume adjustments as needed in the future.”

With the increased number of wounded soldiers returning home from war, along with competitive sporting events such as the Paralympics, the need for top performing prosthetics is in high demand.

“When I was with the Department of Veterans Affairs and saw the type of injured military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with amputations my initial goal was just to introduce and teach them the game of softball,” said Van Sleet.

“That idea turned into the Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team that I created. After five years with the WWAST, I stepped down and was asked to create a more competitive softball team that played softball tournaments.”

“There were amputee players who strived to play at a more competitive and higher level playing tournaments. These players grew up playing baseball, so the next challenge was for them to play competitive baseball with 90 foot bases, nine innings and three-hour game time limits.”

“It has been remarkable to see how these amputee ballplayers have exceeded their rehabilitation goals and are playing at a very competitive level. Never did I expect any of this to materialize and gain the amount of attention it has, but the real winners in all of this are the players who were given another chance at being ballplayers and athletes again.”



**Carlo Adame sporting his latest prosthetic from Greg Davidson**



**Carlo Adame bats during the Louisville Slugger Warriors exhibition game against the 2018 SSUSA Tournament of Champions (TOC) All-Stars.**



**Carlo Adame looks to turn two during the Louisville Slugger Warriors exhibition game against the 2018 SSUSA Tournament of Champions (TOC) All-Stars.**



**Carlo Adame's latest prosthetic built by Greg Davidson**