

NSGA May 2019 Athlete of the Month

Kory Kelly, 52
Ogden, Utah

Pickleball Therapy



Athletes go through struggles on and off the field, but few have faced adversity at a level similar to what Kory Kelly has been through. After serving in Afghanistan as a member of the Air Force and on special assignment to other government organizations, Kelly was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to an extreme level where he would stay at home except when he had to go to work.

“I went to a therapist for five years,” he recalls. “Three years in, he told me that I should tell others my story and challenged me to do so.”

Pickleball helped Kory break out and conquer the illness. He was introduced to the sport with a funny name after his mother invited him to play with a few of her church friends one day. He fell in love with it. A week later, he moved to Texas and shortly thereafter went to the local YMCA with his wife and entered a tournament to play as a means of entertainment. Since that initial competition, Kory has steadily improved his game by participating in 40 tournaments and now has a 5.0 player rating.

However, Kory found more than a recreational sport as he has gained the ability to share his story with others who are suffering from the disorder. He even has a phrase to describe it.

“I coined the phrase ‘pickleball therapy’,” he says. “Shortly after I began playing, I started saying that pickleball was free therapy for me, and I started opening up about my PTSD. I realized the game made my mood better, and the people I played with became my family. I’m doing something healthy for my mind and body. It’s free pickleball therapy every time that I play.”

The free therapy he receives from the sport he has come to love has given him the opportunity to share his story with other people that may be suffering similar difficulties. Kory, like others with the affliction, is susceptible to loud noises and competes with earplugs to avoid distractions.

After his many challenges, including medical issues with his kidneys last year, Kory is excited to travel to Albuquerque to participate in his first National Senior Games thanks to assistance from the “Hand Up From Humana” program that was offered this year.

His playing attire is a conversation starter. People will have no trouble finding Kelly during a tournament as he sports the colors of the United States- red, white and blue- to show his affirmation for the country he served honorably.

Thank you for your service, Kory, and welcome to your family in the Senior Games Movement.

- Vincent Pensabene

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