

young people who rock

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Carlos Leon

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Carlos Leon, 24, is a member of the U.S. Paralympics Track and Field team.

I thought it would be all business when Carlos Leon was training for the Beijing Olympics at the Lakeshore Foundation in Birmingham, Alabama. No talking. No laughing. I was wrong. At first I gave Carlos his space when he was lifting and doing cardio. But, Carlos is full of soul and spunk even while he's doing his serious training. He even invited me to join in (although my weights were much lighter than his).

From a headshot or the right camera angle, you'd think Carlos is competing in discus at the Olympics. But, he's the first to emphasize that he will be in the *Paralympics*. The 24-year-old Iraq veteran became a quadriplegic while he was diving in Hawaii, celebrating being back in the states.

His physical setback has not squandered his dreams. He's focused enough to ban his parents from visiting him at the training facility where he now lives. But, he's humble and fun enough to let a camera crew in to hang out with him days before he's set to compete.

Update: [Watch the CNN.com Live interview](#)

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Carlos Leon, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, was injured in a diving accident in 2005. After meeting five-time Paralympian Gabe Diaz de Leon at a USOC Paralympic Military Sports Camp, he was encouraged to get involved in field events.

At the 2007 Parapan American Games in Rio, he came away with two medals and shortly thereafter learned that he had been selected as a member of the 2007 U.S. Paralympics Track & Field Elite Team. This was the first step on his journey to Beijing, where Leon made his debut in the Paralympic Games in September 2008.

Throughout his training, Leon lived at Lakeshore Foundation (Birmingham, Ala.), an official U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Site, as part of the U.S. Olympic Committee's Veterans Paralympic Performance Program (VP3).