

# Team USA Wheelchair Rugby

## ★ Athlete Profile ★

### Bill Renje #1

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Class 1.5

Hometown: Tampa, Florida

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Bill Renje's evolution into a National team caliber wheelchair rugby player was a slow one. After a gunshot wound in 1989 left him paralyzed from the chest down, Renje spent the next two years in outpatient therapy just trying to muster enough strength to effectively push his wheelchair. In 1991, some rugby players approached him at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago where Renje underwent his therapy. He had always been competitive, and looked at rugby as a new challenge. He made his debut as a Chicago Cruiser in 1991. After enrolling at the University of Illinois the following fall, Renje played the next three years for the Fighting Illini's wheelchair rugby team.

The first two or three years were a blur for Renje. Working hard to gain upper body strength, he also spent his first two seasons on the bench learning the game. By 1994, Renje was starting, and the next season began his rise to the top of his class. In 1995, his last season at Illinois, he helped lead the Illini to the USQRA National Championships. Renje won his first of 24 career All-Tournament awards that year.

Renje returned to Chicago for the 1995-96 season. That year, the Cruisers finished with a team best 7<sup>th</sup> place finish in the nation. At the end of the season, Renje was chosen as one of the 42 players to tryout for the National team. That fall, Team USA would compete in the Atlanta Paralympic Games. While a long shot, Renje had an impressive camp and made the 8-man squad that went on to win the Gold Medal.

After Paralympics, Renje moved to Tampa, Florida where he would play the next four-years as a member of the Tampa Generals. No longer a lone star, Renje was a role player with the deep and loaded Generals squad. He did play an integral role in helping the team to third place finishes after the 1997 and 1998 campaigns. Renje again made the National team and started in the Gold Medal game at the 1998 World Championships in Toronto. Once again, Team USA proved victorious.

The 1999-00 Season might have been Renje's best. The Generals were hampered by a lack of depth resulting from player defections and injuries. Not much was expected from Tampa, but they were the biggest surprise at Nationals finishing fourth. At the season ending banquet, Renje was named the 2000 Athlete of the Year in the United States Quad Rugby Association. In May, Renje survived another grueling tryout camp, and once again was selected to the National team. Team USA will compete in the 2000 Paralympics this October in Sydney, Australia.