



# WORLD HEART GAMES RETURNS IN 2025

## To Help CVD Patients Reclaim the Joy of Sport

*By F. Stuart Sanders, M.D., FACSM, FACP, MAACVPR*

Join us for the 2025 World Heart Games (WHG) on the beautiful campus of Piedmont University & Tallulah Falls School in Habersham County, Georgia on June 20-21, 2025. As an Olympic-style event, the WHG provide two days of safe, fun, and relational competition for those who have experienced a cardiopulmonary event or live with risk factors.

These team-based and individual events will foster a competitive spirit and a healthy lifestyle. All skill levels are welcome to participate and can do so as a team or as an individual. Do not have a team? Individuals can get paired for team-based events after registering. Athletes can compete in a wide variety of challenging, yet safe activities. These provide a monitored and competitive way for the participants to be active in a way that they are physically comfortable.

### **What are the WHG, and how do participants benefit?**

It's an Olympic-style event that provides two days of safe, fun and relational competition for those who have experienced a cardiopulmonary event or live with risk factors. Specifically, the WHG seek to:

- Promote cardiovascular fitness and cardiac rehabilitation
- Provide safe and fun sports competition for cardiac patients
- Improve camaraderie and teamwork among rehab professionals and patients
- Provide research opportunities

WHG is really a chance for participants to reclaim the joy of sports. Participants come highly motivated and excited for the chance to compete and connect with others from around the world. These “cardiac athletes” prepare for the games weeks and months in advance through physical training and skill development.



## **What events will be offered in 2025?**

WHG offers many different sporting events that can be performed safely in a manner consistent with each participant's health status, fitness, and skills. All competitors must secure approval from their physician to participate. They can participate individually or form teams (e.g., those from a given cardiac rehabilitation facility). The team experience adds a significant social dimension to preparations and further enables participants to increase confidence to safely be physically active and develop camaraderie with others through the joy of competition.

Individuals can register for several different endurance events, each of which requires the competitor to predict their finish time within submaximal performance limits familiar to them. The individual events for 2025 include: Basketball Shooting (Men & Women), Bowling, Disc Golf, Game of Knowledge, Golf Putting, Horseshoes, Prediction Walk, Jog, Airdyne Bike, Nustep, Row and Swim, Racquetball, Soccer Shoot (Men & Women), Softball Throw (Men & Women), Table Tennis, and Tennis Singles.

Team-based events are: Bean Bag Toss/Cornhole, Golf (2-person scramble), Pickleball (Doubles), Tennis (Doubles), and Volleyball.

WHG is safe and well supported with medical personnel and equipment in key areas and qualified volunteers who supervise events throughout the venue.

## **Are any scholarships available to help offset the cost?**

Yes, we offer AACVPR Scholarships. Five \$1,000 scholarships are available to teams of at least two athletes from programs in the United States. Applicants will be reviewed by an AACVPR Committee based on criteria listed on the application. You can find more details at

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RNyoyk2NtkUBr1vS8OvT0P74K0YytWR3/edit>.

## **What message does WHG convey to the public?**

Through WHG, ACSM seeks to encourage understanding among physicians, patients, and communities about these major health concerns:

- Patient participation in cardiac rehabilitation in the U.S. is remarkably low, despite strong evidence that the physical training component alone reduces cardiovascular mortality for those with coronary disease;
- CVD continues to be a leading cause of death worldwide, underscoring the continuing need for more definitive prevention and treatment strategies;
- Every person, with or without diagnosed CVD, can reduce their long-term risk by making habitual physical activity part of their lives; and
- Physicians, patients, families, and communities should all understand the benefits of cardiac rehabilitation, a progressive establishment of regular physical activity and healthy lifestyle behaviors.

The takeaway, of course, is that a cardiac condition need not interfere with an active, socially independent life.

## **Does ACSM collaborate with any other organizations on the WHG initiative?**

ACSM partners with [AACVPR](#) and [Georgia Heart Institute](#) for valuable financial and logistical support.

[AACVPR](#), a society of health professionals in the field of cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation, recognizes that many of the cardiac athletes at WHG either have or currently are participating in cardiac rehabilitation, which is why they offer scholarships to help defray costs for team participation.

[Georgia Heart Institute](#) is the comprehensive, multi-disciplinary heart and vascular program of Northeast Georgia Health System (NGHS). With personalized care provided for the complete spectrum of cardiovascular conditions, Georgia Heart Institute is saving and improving lives for generations.

## **Thank you to the WHG planning committee:**

A project the magnitude of the World Heart Games would not be possible without a group of dedicated professionals serving on the organizing committee. Several of them have been on the committee and actively involved since the inception of the games. Join me in thanking the organizing committee:

- F. Stuart Sanders, M.D., FACSM, FACP, MAACVPR, Chair
- Thomas A. Draper, MBA, MAACVPR
- Karen Lui, MS, MAACVPR
- Katie Feltman, Interim CEO, ACSM
- Carl N. King, Ed.D., MAACVPR
- Robert Nichols, Co-Coordinator
- Wyatt Nicholson, MS, ACSM-CEP, Co-Coordinator
- John P. Porcari, Ph.D., FACSM, MAACVPR
- Walt Thompson, Ph.D., FACSM, FAACVPR, FCEPA
- Eric Utterback, ACSM
- With special thanks to The Mended Hearts, Inc

### *About the author:*

*F. Stuart Sanders, M.D., FACSM, FACP, MAACVPR, is an internal and sports medicine physician. He has initiated and directed the Habersham Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation and Cardiovascular Fitness Programs in Demorest, Georgia since 1986. Dr. Sanders also is an adjunct professor of medicine (cardiology) at the Emory University School of Medicine and has served as a physician for four Olympic Games and two Paralympic Games. He currently serves as a Team USA Figure Skating Physician.*