

# Free & Low-Cost Sports & Recreation Opportunities

by Megan Long

*The recession is affecting millions of Americans each day. Because of this, people are less likely to spend money on recreational activities. Meeting everyday needs, plus paying for doctor visits, rehabilitation and prosthetics, already stretches your budget. However, sports and recreation have health benefits such as increasing your flexibility, mobility and coordination. Plus, such activities help develop leadership skills and a higher self-esteem. Also, getting involved with an organized group activity can lead to new friendships and life experiences.*

Is there anything fun you could do that is low-cost or even free? Maybe you enjoy sports, aviation, sailing or horseback riding. There are many different organizations designed to accommodate those with limb differences at little or no cost. Once-in-a-lifetime experiences are waiting right around the corner.

Most of the sports programs that cater to those with limb differences charge a membership fee but registration for classes and competitions cost only a little. Sports include, but are not limited to, cycling, golf, hiking, hunting, fishing, skiing, water sports, running, sailing, strength training, surfing, tennis, tai chi and yoga.

Disabled Sports USA (DS/USA) is a nonprofit organization devoted to providing the “opportunity for individuals with disabilities to gain confidence and dignity through participation in sports, recreation and related educational programs.” It is a network of community-based chapters that organize their own events. Programs are offered for all age and skill ranges, young to old, amateurs to experts.

DS/USA was founded in 1967 by disabled Vietnam veterans under the name National Amputee Skiers Association (NASA). Through the years, the organization has broadened its range of sports and participants. It is a member of the United States Olympic Committee. DS/USA selects and prepares athletes to participate in the summer and winter Olympic Games.

A one-year membership to DS/USA can range between \$25-250. After joining, members receive a one-year subscription to *Challenger* magazine, a sports magazine highlighting people with disabilities who excel in sports. The magazine also provides information on upcoming events/competitions. For more information, visit [www.dsusa.org](http://www.dsusa.org).

The Orthotic and Prosthetic Assistance Fund (OPAF) is another nonprofit organization

devoted to physical fitness through recreation for those “served by the orthotic and prosthetic community.” OPAF’s First Clinics offer adaptive recreational sports programs for amputees at no cost. “We don’t want [cost] to be a factor in anyone’s life,” says Executive Director Robin Burton.

OPAF teaches participants to golf, play tennis, scuba dive and more. First Clinics are held across the country all year long. “The activity is important, but so is the socialization aspect,” says Burton. “It is a huge encouragement to clinic participants to find others like themselves who are getting on with the business of leading happy and productive lives and not falling into depression.” OPAF’s events allow participants to bond over their differences and engage or re-engage in life.

“Please come out and join us,” says Burton. “If you don’t feel comfortable engaging in the activity, come out and support the efforts of others.” Visit OPAF’s Web site ([opfund.org](http://opfund.org)) or check the Amputee Coalition’s online calendar ([www.amputee-coalition.org](http://www.amputee-coalition.org)) for a list of First Clinic dates.

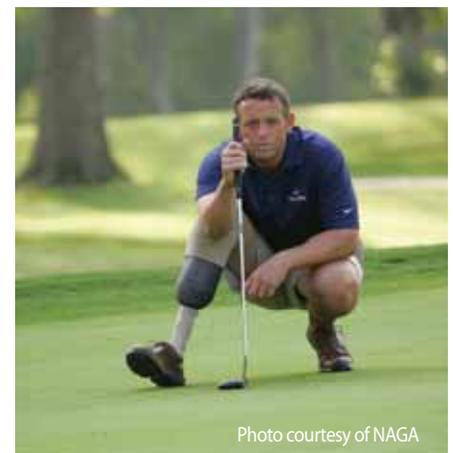


Photo courtesy of NAGA

If your true passion lies on the green, then the National Amputee Golf Association (NAGA) is right on your par. This nonprofit organization has more than 2,000 members from all over the nation and around 200 members from 17 other countries.

“Our goal is to provide a medium that supports camaraderie and course competition,” says Executive Director Bob Wilson.

Wilson, a bilateral below-knee amputee, has found personal strength in the game. “It has been my goal to introduce the game to amputees and other disabled individuals as much as possible to provide them with the opportunity to experience the joys that I have had over the years,” he says.

Membership fees for NAGA are \$25 annually. Memberships include a free issue of *Amputee Golfer* and an annual newsletter. Membership fees also aid in promoting national golf clinics and tournaments. Scholarships are also available to undergraduate amputee students.

NAGA offers “First Swing/Learn to Golf”



Photo courtesy of NAGA

seminars and clinics. Thirty clinics are held across the nation and are free for all amputees. The program teaches adaptive golf to those with physical disabilities.

NAGA conducts national tournaments and sponsors local and regional tournaments throughout the country. These different regions have their own special membership opportunities. The Eastern Amputee Golf Association (EAGA), for example, has a \$15 membership fee. EAGA conducts 8 two-day tournaments (\$150-\$190 entry fee), 7 one-day golf outings (\$70-\$90) and scrambles from April to October. All junior (under 18) and college-age (18-22) amputees, however, are exempt from paying an entry fee for all EAGA tournament events and scrambles.

EAGA memberships include a free subscription to their publication, *EAGA Golfer*, and free instructional videos on request. EAGA also collects used golf clubs to distribute to amputees who are interested in the game. Memberships in regional groups, such as EAGA, do not require one to join NAGA, but it is strongly encouraged.

Are you an animal lover? If so, maybe you'd love riding horseback down a long and winding trail under the hot summer sun. The North American Riding for the Handicapped

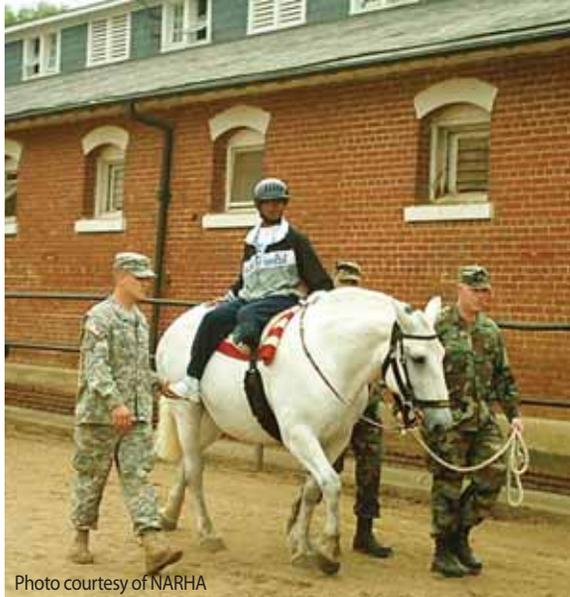


Photo courtesy of NARHA

Association (NARHA) provides opportunities for amputees to engage in equine-assisted activities and therapy. There are 147 NARHA centers across the nation that work with amputees. With over 5,000 members and 730 programs, NARHA has successfully exposed participants to the therapeutic experience that comes with riding.

Costs for service are determined locally at each of the centers. According to Lesley Shear of the Circle of Hope Therapeutic Riding Center, participating in the program allows one to “practice the occupational therapy skills of transferring, balance, coordination and body awareness.” Visit [www.narha.com](http://www.narha.com) to locate a center near you.

Something about being on the open water is calming yet exciting. New Jersey’s Sail-Habilitation, a community-based nonprofit organization, provides recreational, instructional and competitive sailing opportunities for people with disabilities. Sail-Habilitation allows participants to sail on a recreational basis with able-bodied and other individuals with disabilities. Sailing promotes independence, communication and problem-solving, balance and leadership skills.

During the summer, Sail-Habilitation holds Community Days, 3-day events during which local skippers from nearby yacht clubs and marinas take participants out on their private boats. A barbecue dinner follows where

member participants can meet and mingle.

The program serves Ocean and Monmouth counties, as well as the greater New York/Philadelphia metropolitan areas. The Sail-Habilitation program runs from May 1 through October 31 and is affiliated with DS/USA. For further questions and/or event schedules, visit [www.SailHabilitation.org](http://www.SailHabilitation.org)

From the seas, let’s take to the skies. Two programs, Able Flight and Freedom’s Wings International (FWI), give amputees a chance to fly and/or ride in airplanes. Participants can even earn their pilot’s license.

Jessica Cox became the first certified pilot born without arms through Able Flight’s



Photo courtesy of Able Flight

scholarship program. Jessica was trained to fly an Ercoupe 415C, which enabled her to use only her feet (she doesn’t use prosthetic arms). Jessica encourages others to get involved with Able Flight. “Flying has helped me experience the greatest form of empowerment,” she says.

“It is the ultimate form of independence.”

The Able Flight Scholarship is an all-expenses paid award, covering ground and flight training, testing, travel and lodging as required. “Earning a scholarship for flight training is like being given a key that unlocks the door to a whole new world – the sky,” Cox says.

“Able Flight’s mission is to offer people with disabilities a unique way to challenge themselves through flight training, and by doing so, to gain greater self-confidence and self-reliance,” says Executive Director Charles Stites. “This is not a short-term adventure experience, but instead, scholarship winners usually travel to a training location for 5-6 weeks of determined effort and study that can lead to a pilot’s license.”

Freedom’s Wings International also enables amputees to experience flying. They use a sailplane (an airplane with no motor) that



Photo courtesy of Freedom’s Wings, Inc.

is specially adapted with hand controls to operate the rudders. The plane is towed aloft by a power plane releasing at 3,000 feet and then rises into the sky, flying in circles to stay aloft. “It is much like a hawk soaring over a farmer’s field,” says President Richard Fucci.

Freedom’s Wings offers a free 20-minute introductory ride to people with disabilities. Each additional ride is the cost of a tow (usually around \$55). If participants want to learn

to fly, the instruction and use of the aircrafts are at no charge. To be able to take advantage of this, however, one must be a member of both Freedom’s Wings and the Soaring Society of America (around \$100 annually).

To find out more about Freedom’s Wings and the Able Flight Scholarship Program visit [www.FreedomsWings.org](http://www.FreedomsWings.org) and [www.AbleFlight.org](http://www.AbleFlight.org)

When your budget is tight and you still want to experience life to the fullest, take advantage of these numerous programs. There are lifelong friendships to be made and self-confidence to be gained. Whether on land, water or sky, there are opportunities everywhere that won’t cause any financial burdens. It is up to you to make it happen. ■