

Minnesota Disabled Hockey Report
September 9, 2016

USA Disabled Hockey:

Disabled Hockey Workshop

USA Hockey is proud to announce that the 2016 Disabled Hockey Workshop will be September 30 - October 2 in Nashville, TN. New and existing program administrators from around the country will come together for a weekend of educational sessions and networking. The best part is that the workshop is FREE! Participants will be responsible for transportation and hotel cost, but the actual educational sessions will be covered by the USA Hockey Disabled Hockey Section.

This year we will again be offering individual sessions for attendees to choose from. Many of the sessions will be offered multiple times so you can get to the ones you want. Some of the tentative sessions include:

- Try Hockey Events / Clinics
- Strategic Planning
- Partnering with the Pros in your community
- Promoting your program: Update and perfecting your elevator speech
- Supporting Your Program: Financials
- Supporting Your Program: Volunteers
- Sustainability: Player recruitment
- Developing Disabled Learn to Skate programs (can create sustainability for your program)
- Before you get on the ice: Path to establishing a program
- Hockey benefits beyond the ice time: Take your program to another level off the ice
- Sustaining your program: defining and implementing your mission and vision
- The Rink GM: Building a relationship with your home rink
- ADM (American Development Model): Applying the concepts to disabled players

The workshop will begin at noon on Friday, September 30, and will conclude at noon on Sunday, October 2.

Women's USA sled hockey team selected

Seventeen players have been named to the 2016-17 U.S. Women's Sled Hockey Team. The group includes nine forwards, six defensemen and two goalies. Minnesota's own Hannah Hughes became the first female sled player to make the national team.

Nashville To Host 2016 Sled Classic, Presented by the NHL

Seventh Annual Four-Day Event To Take Place Nov. 17-20 at Ford Ice Center

USA Hockey announced today that the Nashville Predators and the Nashville Sled Preds will host the seventh annual USA Hockey Sled Classic, presented by the NHL. The four-day event will take place November 17-20, 2016, at the Ford Ice Center, operated by the Nashville Predators to continue the growth of hockey and skating in Middle Tennessee, in Antioch, Tenn.

First staged in 2010, the USA Hockey Sled Classic is an annual round-robin format tournament between NHL-affiliated sled hockey teams. All competing teams represent their affiliated NHL club by wearing official NHL licensed jerseys with local club marks and logos.

Over 20 NHL sled teams are expected to play in this year's tournament and will feature four divisions. Last year, the event featured 20 teams affiliated with NHL clubs and culminated in the Florida Panthers winning the Tier I Division, the Columbus Blue Jackets claiming the Tier II Division, the Arizona Coyotes capturing the Tier III Division, and the Buffalo Sabres capturing the Tier IIII Division.

Save the Date!

2017 Disabled Festival: San Jose, Ca, April 6-9

Minnesota Disabled Hockey:

Minnesota Warriors:

MN Warriors received a \$30,000 matching grant (\$15,000) from the MN Wild Foundation. That money is earmarked for expansion of three teams, Duluth, Breezy Point and Fergus Falls.

We were invited to the 117th Annual VFW Annual Convention held in Charlotte NC. One of our members, Brian Duffy was elected and installed as the National commander in Chief. at a meeting before the start of the convention we sat down with him and discussed how we want to grow warrior hockey. We are working on following up on the 30 + leads generated at the Convention

Brian has appointed an VFW ambassador to oversee hockey expansion and want to have a host a VFW tournament. We are still working out those details.

We displayed for the second year at Military Appreciation day at the Minnesota State fair. We gained four new members that day as we had a puck shooting game.

Minnesota Sled Hockey:

Metro team update:

Danny Lilya, Minnesota Wild Sled Hockey, named Military Kid of the Year by the United Heroes League

MOOSE LAKE — One by one, the Moose Lake-Willow River football team spilled from its spartan locker room Wednesday, players slicing shortcuts through the lawn and toward the practice field, some 50 yards away.

Not Danny Lilya.

The 15-year-old Moose Lake sophomore propelled his wheelchair along the raindrop-splotted sidewalk — left, right, then right again — which led to a strip of pavement flanking the field. From there, he watched the Rebels prepare for tonight's home game vs. Elk River, Minn.-based Spectrum. His involvement typically comes later in practice, when he, Nick Wegge and Tyler Mehrkens work on point-after-touchdown kicks.

Lilya is the holder. Confined to a wheelchair most of his life, he is — at first glance — the unlikeliest of contributors for one of Minnesota's premier prep programs.

"I used to play recess football with my friends at school, but I guess I never thought that I'd actually be on the varsity team," Lilya, born with a broken back stemming from a congenital spinal defect, said on an overcast afternoon.

But there he was in last week's season-opening rout of rival Barnum, wheeling onto the field four different times to corral Mehrkens' snaps and set them up for Wegge, the kicker. The first two attempts fizzled; the next two were good.

Danny, wearing his apple-red No. 28 jersey, black face paint applied liberally, held from his knees. His wheelchair was moved about 20 yards behind the play by one of the game's officials, Dan Johnson. Keeping the laces out proved difficult. Danny's father, Dan Lilya, gave him grief for that.

An excited Danny Lilya bounced around on his knees after the first successful kick sailed through the uprights. A year ago, he saw game action for a down or two late in the regular-season finale vs. Hermantown. This was different, though. This was a scoring play.

"I was pretty excited because I've been watching them for years and years — ever since I was in kindergarten — and to finally be on the team and go out there during a scoring play was just amazing," Danny said.

MLWR coach Dave Louzek long has embraced an everybody-is-welcome mantra.

"I remember a few years ago he said there's always going to be a spot on the Rebel football team for Danny, whether we have to carry him onto the bus and put him into his seat or whatever," the elder Lilya recalled.

And how couldn't your heart swell?

Mehrkens says the Rebels don't treat Danny any differently. He's an integral part of the team, a teenager prone to the same "shenanigans with his buddies," according to his dad, and one who loves sports. His favorite subject in school is shop class.

"He may look different — he's got wheels for legs — but he's still just a regular person to us," Mehrkens, a junior, said.

Said Wegge, a senior: "I think it's cool because it shows other teams and other people, maybe someone else who has a disability, it might make them want to join and feel a part of a team."

It was Danny's idea at the end of last fall to be the holder. He was seeking an expanded role. Louzek was receptive. The Rebels cleared it with Barnum's coaching staff, plus the officiating crew, ahead of last week's contest. Louzek told the Bombers to rush as they normally would. Because of Danny's limited range of motion, Mehrkens has to be spot-on with his snaps. They're getting better.

Despite 166 victories and 11 Section 7AA titles in 18 years at MLWR, Louzek's is not a win-at-all-costs mentality. He stresses inclusiveness.

"I think a lot of kids that maybe don't quite fit that normal athletic mold do find a place here because we as coaches really emphasize the importance for these kids to accept everybody," Louzek said. "We talk a lot about how everybody is important to this team, that everybody has a role on this team, and so over the years the kids have an understanding that if they come out for Rebel football, they're going to be welcomed. And we do find a way to make it meaningful for them."

Danny spoke decisively and matter-of-factly Wednesday while his nearby teammates, emanating a smell so distinct to anyone who's ever been around frequently used and seldom-washed football practice gear, continued to carve up their already-brown field. He firmly shook a reporter's hand.

Danny plays football for the same reasons others do. He loves the sport, relishes the camaraderie and grew up cheering for MLWR.

And he likes being active — an offshoot, perhaps, of spending much of his first two years in a body cast thanks to numerous spinal-reconstruction surgeries.

Aside from football, Danny is a talented and nationally competitive sled hockey player. He's the youngest member of the Minnesota Wild's adult sled team by about 10 years. He also competes with a wheelchair softball squad out of Brooklyn Park, Minn.

"We really haven't given him the option of not being active," Dan Lilya said. "There have been a lot of times where you want to as a parent ... you're looking at a child who has a

disability and he can't keep up with the other kids, but you have to just try and pull back and let him try to figure out a way to make things work. I won't deny it: There have been a number of times both his mom (Sheryl Lilya) and I have sat there and had tears in our eyes.

"You want to reach down and grab him and pick him up, but you know that you're not always going to be there to do that."

Dan Lilya served in four of the five branches of the United States Armed Forces (all except the Navy). It opened the door for his son to recently be named Military Child of the Year by the United Heroes League, formerly known as Defending the Blue Line. He will be recognized at the Camo Gala on Sept. 17 at Target Field.

Danny Lilya doesn't use his wheelchair as an excuse. It's a lesson no Rebel can learn in a playbook.

"It's a good experience for the rest of the kids on the team to have that understanding," Louzek said. "In society, we all have different strengths, we all have different things that we can offer to make things better. For these kids that are able-bodied to work right alongside a kid in a wheelchair, I think is a great experience for them to see that, yeah, everybody does have things that they can offer and contribute to a team."

Rochester team update:

In the past 3 months for the Rochester team...

- Board members spoke at the 2016 National Wheelchair Sports Camp, Ironwood Springs Christian Ranch, Stewartville, MN, June 13, 2016.
- Players attended the Try Sled Hockey Day and Coulee Region Sled Hockey Program Kickoff, LaCrosse WI, July 11, 2016.
- We purchased our new trailer with the Minnesota Wild Foundation funds and are having it wrapped as I type or soon with the logos of all the organizations that have supported us.
- For the future events...this Saturday, September 10th is our Celebrity game!!!! Please let everyone know they are welcome to the game and after party!!

Minnesota Special Hockey:

- We are looking forward to celebrating our 10 season.
- We are opening registration in September and holding our annual meeting and skate at Mariucci Arena in October.
- We had a fantastic summer picnic in July. Everyone had a chance to meet up with teammates and play a little wiffle ball.

- We continue to look for ways to reach more hockey players.
- We are working hard to make our 10th anniversary season the biggest and best so far, and are offering a 10th anniversary reduced registration fee to celebrate.

Minnesota Disabled Hockey Committee:

Minnesota Sled Officials workshop and coaches clinic in the works

This year Minnesota Disabled Hockey will host a one day workshop for officials interested in working sled hockey games. In addition, plans are being made to host our disabled hockey coach's clinic in the Brainerd area. Stay tuned for further details.

General information:

Minnesota Disabled Hockey to start Blind Hockey program in 2017

Respectfully submitted,
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USA Disabled Hockey Director
Minnesota District