



2011 Edition

GRWSA 2012 Events Save the Dates!

Adult Tennis Doubles Benefit
at Ramblewood
January 6 – 8

Junior Pacers
Home Tournament
January 7 – 8

Sled Wings
Home Tournament
March 10 – 11

Golf Outing Fundraiser
at Thousand Oaks
June 4

Midwest Outdoor Wheelchair
Tennis Tournament
July 13 – 15

Jr. Wheelchair Sports Camp
July 23 – 27

Quad Rugby Tournament
TBD*

Family Day at the Whitecaps
TBD*

* Please check our website for
updates and details regarding
these, and all, of our events.
www.grwsa.com



Photo courtesy of Fiercerphoto.com

235 Wealthy St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
616.242.0351

www.grwsa.com

MOVING IN THE COMMUNITY

A Letter From Our President



Four words come to mind while cheering for our players during a basketball tournament, watching a handcyclist at the starting line of the Fifth Third River Bank Run, or seeing the Sled Wings out on the ice hitting the puck. Inspiration, Courage, Perseverance, and Determination – all describe the athletes who are a part of the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association. These words are certainly worthy of an able-bodied athlete; however, it takes a person of amazing character to play a sport in the adapted sense.

Inspiration... to rise above the physical disability and accept life as it is now. Our athletes inspire others every day. They have the drive to be the best they can be with the circumstances given to them, whether they were born with their physical challenge or acquired it through an accident.

Courage... to try something completely out of their comfort zone. It takes courage for a disabled athlete to rise above any mental obstacles and the stereotypes set before them.

Perseverance... to practice. To never give up because that would be showing the world that they could not succeed. So they practice over and over again, until their family, friends, and the community see how they have mastered their sport.

Determination... to overcome any barriers and take their sport to the highest level of performance. They are obtaining college scholarships in wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis. Our athletes enter tournaments to WIN!

I hope you are able to attend one of our many wheelchair sporting events and witness for yourself all the wonderful qualities possessed by the athletes of the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association, both on and off the court.

Much thanks,
Maria L. Besta, CTRS
GRWSA President

“Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all.”

- Dale Carnegie





Team GRWSA

For the third consecutive year, the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association will be one of 21 Charity Partners that are part of the **Fifth Third River Bank Run**. It continues to be a great opportunity to show the community who we are as an organization. In addition, it allows us to raise additional funds by asking our athletes and others to run for a cause...our cause! You too can run, walk, or roll for GRWSA by collecting pledges from sponsors. Get involved and be a part of TEAM GRWSA by contacting Maria Besta at info@grwsa.com or call 616.242.0352.



Batter Up at Fifth Third Ballpark

On a mid-summer's day, wheelchair athletes and their families once again took to the softball fields at Fifth Third Ballpark!! What a great day it was...we had two games going in the Whitecaps parking lot with Crash, the Whitecaps mascot, making a lot of errors on both fields. The Whitecaps ball players, ten in all, added a wonderful element to the game. In the end, they didn't do very well in their wheelchairs! All players heard their names announced on the megaphone as Anne Gallup from GRWSA called it play-by-play. After the game, everyone headed to the deck for a baseball lunch of burgers and dogs. We had great fun and lots of laughs. Thanks for coming (110 in all) and we hope to see you next year!

Hitting the Ice

Hockey season is underway! The Grand Rapids Sled Wings have started their second season of competition in the Mid America-Great Lakes League, joining teams from Detroit, Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne, and Columbus, with each team hosting a tournament in their respective city. Proving to be very competitive and tons of fun, the first season ended in March at the Grand Rapids tournament with Pittsburgh as league champions—Congratulations! Coaches Leo DelCarmen and Steve Kozlowski are working hard on new plays and strategies, preparing the Sled Wings for their second season and first tournament in November.

Check out our upcoming events...

- New! On December 30, the Sled Wings vs. the Muskegon Lumberjacks at L.C. Walker Arena. Come and see the Lumberjacks get their first taste of sled hockey.
- Annual Sled Wings vs. Grand Rapids Griffins sled hockey game on February 28. This game always offers some good entertainment! You will even have the opportunity to try out a sled on the ice and see for yourself what it's all about.
- Our home tournament, March 10–11 at Patterson Ice Arena in Kentwood. The Junior Sled Wings will be there that weekend too!

Come on out and enjoy the fun!

Bouncing into Action

We proudly support all of our GRWSA teams, including three wheelchair basketball teams. The Junior Pacers are a prep team of beginner players and shoot the basket at an 8.5 ft. rim. After those players grow, become stronger, and develop their skills, they have the ability to move up to our varsity Junior Pacers team. We also offer an adult Pacers team for those players who graduate from high school, along with other adult athletes.

Both teams had a great season! Our prep team placed second in the nation and the varsity team placed third. The adult team placed sixth in the nation for their 2010-2011 season.

We are very excited to announce that two of our varsity Junior Pacers athletes who graduated in 2011 are now playing wheelchair basketball in college! Jillian Host is playing for the University of Whitewater in Wisconsin and Torey Crosby is on the team at Southwest Minnesota State University. GRWSA wheelchair basketball has opened so many doors for our players, and we are delighted to say, "It all started here."



Photo courtesy of FiercePhoto.com

GRWSA
is pleased
to be chosen as a member
of the Paralympic Sport
Club Network.



U.S. Paralympics, a division of the U.S. Olympic Committee, is dedicated to becoming the world leader in the Paralympic sports movement and to promoting excellence in the lives of persons with physical disabilities. Visit the U.S. Paralympics website at www.usparalympics.org.

**Look for programs or events
providing a
Paralympic experience
right here in Grand Rapids!**



Hi. My name is Shane Brewer and I am 12 years old. I have Spina Bifida and have been attending Sports Camp at GVSU for three years now. I LOVE going to wheelchair sports camp to see my friends and experience different sports. This year I was one of three kids picked to win my very own sports chair! When they called my name I was very surprised and could not believe it. My friends had to tell me to go up to the front and get my certificate. I was really, really happy and grateful to Airway Oxygen for picking me to win. I couldn't wait to go home and call all of my friends to tell them that I was picked Camper of the Year and won my OWN sports chair!!

I can't wait to play basketball with it. I hope to be even better than I was before and I will work very hard to help my team win! I have been playing with the Grand Rapids Pacers prep team – this will be my third year where we have taken second in the nation two years in a row in Denver, CO. I love playing basketball even though it is really hard. I love traveling and meeting new kids from all over. I'm in and out of the hospital a lot, but I always look forward



to playing basketball with my friends and that helps me to get better so that I can get back to basketball.

If it weren't for Mary Free Bed, GVSU, Airway Oxygen, GRWSA, and all of the other sponsors, I wouldn't be able to do this camp. Wheelchair sports means a lot to me and I look forward to playing basketball every day! One more thing, I owe a big THANKS to the best doctor in the whole world (especially my world), Dr. Steinhardt, who always takes care of me!

Shane Brewer

Heading Outdoors!

Thanks to grants and generous donations, GRWSA is able to offer opportunities throughout the year for those interested in fishing and archery.

Our third annual charter fishing trip took place on September 11, which was sponsored in part by the Muskegon Charter Boat Association. Six participants and their family members enjoyed a great day of fishing out on the Big Lake. The fish were definitely biting this year with a total catch of 34 – our best year yet! On September 18, the Blandford Nature Center hosted five GRWSA participants on an archery deer hunt. Both were great events.

If you would like information regarding our upcoming outdoor events, please contact Alan at 517.490.3893 or email alpomranka@hotmail.com.



Find us on:
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www.facebook.com/GRWSA



Our Wish List

Adult Tennis Racquets\$50 each

Tennis Balls\$55 per case

USTA QuickStart Foam Balls
for Kids \$60 per bag

Handcycle Team Jerseys\$75 each

Handcycle Helmets.....\$100 each

Indoor Handcycle Rollers ...\$250 each

Five-day Jr. Sports Camp
Experience\$300 per child

Sled Wings Away
Uniforms \$800 per team

Basketball Sports Chair\$2,500 each

Ice Time for Sled
Wings\$3,760 per season

Handcycles..... \$4,000-6,000 each

Equipment Transport Trailer \$8,000

GRWSA Sports
Complex.....\$1,000,000,000

**GRWSA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.
Contributions are fully tax deductible.*

Wheels in Motion

The sport of handcycle racing has become increasingly popular among individuals with physical disabilities. Bike and foot races all over the United States are offering a handcycle division to provide additional competitive opportunities. To entice athletic participation, races are offering ever-increasing prize monies, as well as travel and hotel stipends. The Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association proudly supports a handcycle racing team to assist local racers who have the desire to compete at an advanced level. The program provides athletic training, sports opportunities and financial support. 2011 marks the team's second successful year on the racing circuit.

The handcycle racing team competitions included the GVSU Wheel Run Together, Fifth Third River Bank Run, Le Champion Pave Criterion, The 42-85 Criterion, Crim 10 Miler, Birmingham Bike Festival and Oktoberfest Marathon. The team had an excellent showing at the 2011 Fifth Third River Bank Run with fifteen athletes competing.

Amazing finishes for the 2011 racing season include:

- 16 year old Tabitha Landon finished first at the Fifth Third River Bank Run with a time of 1:27:19.
- Tabitha Landon, Alisha Middel, and Jessica Spote finished as the top three in the Women's division at the Fifth Third River Bank Run.
- Brad Baumann, Tyler Anderson, and Chris Melton finished as the top three at the Dexter-Ann Arbor Run.
- Brad Baumann took second place in the Le Champion Pave Criterion.
- Tyler Anderson, Brad Baumann, and Bryan Wilkinson took the top three at the Celebration Cinema Criterium.
- Brad Baumann finished first at the Oktoberfest Marathon.

Bryan Wilkinson, handcycle racing team coach, stated, "It was a fun season and everyone did an amazing job. We created a lot of buzz about the team by being on a few morning shows like TakeFive and eightWest." He also said, "It's a lot of fun seeing all of the heads turn as we cruise by the spectators." We look forward to the 2012 racing season where we will be expanding our competition outside of Michigan and seeing our team's continued growth. Bryan further stated, "We are still in our infant stages and need a lot of community support."



**"You miss
100%
of the shots
you don't
take."**

- Wayne Gretzky

Believe & Achieve

An Interview with GRWSA Tennis Athlete, Dan Bolhouse

Q Tell us how you became involved with GRWSA and how long you have been playing wheelchair tennis?

A Nine years ago, I received a call following an article in the Grand Rapids Press to come out and try wheelchair tennis. That was the first time I was introduced to GRWSA and I realized how lucky I was to have a program supporting me!

Q When you were starting out in this sport, did you have a mentor or someone you looked up to? How did it help you?

A I started playing tennis around 7th grade and my role model/mentor was my older brother. He wanted to play tennis on the high school team and needed a hitting partner, so I was the easiest person for him to use. He helped me gain success in all sports because practicing with a bigger, faster, and stronger person is the most effective way to improve.

Q Starting out as a beginner and quickly advancing up to the highest Men's Open division, what type of practice and dedication did it take on your part?

A When I was traveling to numerous tournaments each season, I tried to hit at least three days a week or more to keep my game sharp. After talking to many top players, I learned that most practice four to five days a week and I realized that for me to reach my goals, I needed to put in more hard work on the practice courts.

Q How has it helped define your role, knowing that newer players – both kids and adults – look at you as a mentor and role model?

A As I've grown as a person, I've tried to be more vocal in helping



other players in the program. When I started playing wheelchair tennis I was driven to achieve my own goals on the court; however, the past few years I've realized how gratifying it is to help others improve.

Q Shifting this year from both a player and mentor to coaching, what new found confidence does it give you and does it change the way you see yourself on the court?

A I've changed my entire viewpoint when I'm on the court. I no longer focus solely on my game, but watch and observe other players and try to assist them whenever possible. It's an awesome experience to offer advice to a player and after a short time, my advice clicks and they "get it."

Q You were recently hired at Orchard Hills Athletic Club and will hopefully be doing some teaching there. You also completed an internship at the Midland Tennis Center this past year and seem to enjoy more of the teaching role lately. How has GRWSA helped you and what things will be an advantage for you, especially teaching able-bodied students?

A GRWSA is the reason I'm doing what I do today. After I stopped playing competitive tennis in college, I rarely touched a racket. My life moved to another chapter and tennis wasn't part of

it anymore. When I was injured, I needed to find an outlet for my competitive nature and tennis easily filled that void. I still laugh about my first wheelchair practice, because I had to borrow a racket since I had loaned all mine to friends and family over the years. I utilize many of the GRWSA practice formats for my lessons and programs for both wheelchair and able-bodied players.

GRWSA has been a major reason why I've been as successful as I've been; the financial assistance, the social aspect, and having many opportunities to play tennis is a tremendous thing. Not many people, disabled or able-bodied, have the privileges I've been given by GRWSA.

Q As you look back from being a beginner player, to mentor, to coach, and now being employed, what advice do you have for newer players who are contemplating trying the sport of wheelchair tennis?

A The first thing I'd tell a newer player is the need to set goals for themselves. Goals are the reason why I've been successful and why I've been willing to practice and work hard to improve. My high school coach had a statement posted on the wall, "To fail to plan is to plan to fail." These words have proved true many times over.

More advice for a beginner is to approach wheelchair tennis with an open mind, especially for a player who has never played before. Tennis is a game that requires hard work and effort, both physically and mentally, to be successful. It takes time and effort, but the rewards are incredible. I recall the first tournament I won like it was yesterday. I had a feeling of success and knew that the hours I spent practicing had been done for a reason!

Can You Hear the “Thunder” Rumble in Grand Rapids?

No, it is not the Michigan weather brewing – it is the newly developed Grand Rapids Wheelchair Rugby Team. This full-contact wheelchair sport is a fast paced game with high scoring, hard hitting, and a competitive in-your-face style that attracts a broad range of athletes looking to compete and have fun. The Grand Rapids Thunder was formed last year by Brianna Ferguson, a recent Recreational Therapy graduate of Grand Valley State University. Brianna is the team manager and has helped coordinate the schedule, practice times, and team functions. To participate, all athletes must have a disability or impairment in all four limbs, which can include spinal cord injuries, amputations, cerebral palsy, or birth defects. Each athlete must be fitted to a chair according to their disability and function; this depends on their role as offense or defense. The less function an athlete has qualifies them as a defensive player, and more function places them as a ball handler for offense. With two female athletes and Miss Wheelchair Michigan winners playing key roles, the team is full of high spirit and eager to learn and have fun.

The Michigan Storm Wheelchair Rugby Team, based on the east side of the state, helped the new Thunder ruggers get associated with the sport by coaching them at practice and their six tournaments last season. A few of these tournaments included Pittsburg, Chicago, Ohio, and St. Louis. The team caught on very quickly with independent roles both on and off the court and are already gearing up for the 2011-2012 season. The goals this year are to host their own tournament and become more competitive in the U.S. Quad Rugby Association league. There are over 40 teams competing for the National Championship in Louisville, Kentucky in April 2012. With dedicated training and constant learning, this is where the Thunder sees themselves in the future. We welcome all disabled athletes to join and smash all those stereotypes out there one hit at a time.

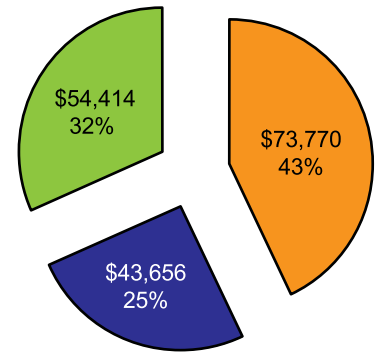


GRWSA Mission Statement

To provide and promote competitive and recreational wheelchair sports for persons with physical disabilities.



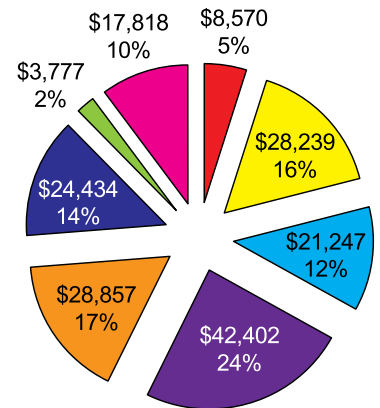
2011 GRWSA Funding



- Fundraising
- Donations
- Grants

Donations, fundraising, and grants of \$160,000 allows GRWSA to serve 155 wheelchair athletes in nine wheelchair sports. This can't be done without the support of people like you.

2011 GRWSA Spending



- Archery
- Wheelchair Tennis
- Wheelchair Basketball - adult
- Wheelchair Basketball - youth
- Jr. Wheelchair Sports Camp
- Sled Hockey - adult
- Handcycling Team
- Quad Rugby Team

*The GRWSA fiscal year runs from October - October.