



## **Union Sports Arena hosts 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Mischa Zimmerman Memorial Sled Hockey Game**

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UNION, NEW JERSEY – Union Sports Arena, in Union NJ, recently hosted a face-off between the New Jersey Devils Youth Hockey Club's Sled Hockey team and an all-star squad of firefighters featuring Elizabeth and Kearny firefighters in a special friendly charity sled hockey match to benefit the "Kids Helping Kids Foundation" in the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Mischa Zimmerman Memorial Game. "This was an exciting night of sled hockey for a wonderful cause," said Al Graul, coach of the NJDYHC sled team based at South Mountain Arena in West Orange. "We're very appreciative that the firefighters from the cities of Kearny and Elizabeth were able to join us to showcase this fast paced sport."

The all-star squad the Devils faced at the Union Sports Arena included firefighters from the FMBA Locals 9 and 18. All proceeds from the game went to the "Kids Helping Kids Foundation," which was founded by Mischa Zimmerman, a Montclair native who lost his nine year long battle with brain cancer in February at the age of 22.

Zimmerman, who wore the number 18 Devils jersey, was a founding member of the NYDYHC Sled Hockey team which provides youngsters and young adults with mobility impairments an opportunity to develop athletic skills and play the fastest game on ice. Since its inception during the 2000-2001 season, the Devils Sled Hockey team has conducted many special exhibitions and games against teams of disabled and able bodied players.

"Mischa was a regular at our sled hockey practices at South Mountain Arena, and he joined us whenever he could for games and exhibitions there," Graul said. A student at New York University at the time of his death, Zimmerman helped organize sled hockey games between his Devils squad and the NYU varsity hockey team. His "Kids Helping Kids Foundation" is a nonprofit organization which conducted fund raisers and organized volunteers who made visits to children at area hospitals undergoing treatment for cancers. This event raised over \$2,700 to help continue the work that Zimmerman started.

### Sled Hockey

Sled hockey is an exciting sport that uses the same rules as hockey. Instead of leg skating, players sit on specially designed sleds and use two short sticks to propel themselves across the ice. Legal body contact and raised puck shooting are as much a part of sled hockey as they are in traditional hockey.

Sled hockey players discover that skating in a sled is fun and a great form of exercise. It increases strength, coordination and conditions the upper and lower body. The balance needed to propel, turn, stop and play the puck gives arms, legs, back, and abdominal muscles a real work out. Some paraplegics who play regularly notice an increase in balance when using their wheelchairs.

Equipment for the sport includes a tubular framed sled between 3 and 5 feet long. The sled sits 3 inches off the ice with two hockey skate blades mounted beneath the seat. A portion of the front frame rests on the ice and provides stability. Straps around the ankles, knees, and waist securely hold the player on the sledge. A pair of 30 inch "sticks" is used to propel. The custom made sled hockey sticks have 4 mm teeth attached to the bottom of the butt end. Leaning left or right while digging the stick into the ice, turns the sled. Players slide to side on one or both blades using a hockey stop. All players must wear IIHF regulation protective hockey equipment.

Both males and females are encouraged to participate in this sport. It's a sport that totally integrates players with mobility limitations, amputees, and able-bodied people with knee, leg or hip injuries that limit their participation in standard hockey.

#### NJ Devils Youth Hockey Sled Team



In December 2000, the New Jersey Devils Youth Hockey Club took a step towards truly realizing their mission of "helping youth of all ages and skill levels to learn the values of teamwork, sportsmanship, commitment, self-esteem, discipline and responsibility" by starting the first sled hockey team in northern NJ. With the help of Paralympic athletes Mike Doyle and Vic Calise, who both competed in Nagano in 1998, the club was able to develop a program that allows children with mobility impairments that prevent them from playing stand-up hockey to enjoy this sport.

The Devils team has grown to about a dozen athletes ranging in age from eight to twenty. One of their alumni has even gone on to play sled hockey at college! The NJ Devils Youth Sled Hockey team is focused on providing a relaxed and fun environment for their players, giving them the chance to develop their skills and spend time with other hockey-lovers. They frequently play exhibition games against able-bodied teams, and if you are interested in scheduling a game with them, please contact the club at 973-731-7177 or [NJAdmin@mycomcast.com](mailto:NJAdmin@mycomcast.com).

#### Union Sports Arena

Union Sports Arena is a recreational ice skating and soccer center featuring a regulation NHL-size ice rink (200' by 85'), a 5000+ square foot indoor soccer center, the Athletic Edge athletic performance enhancement training center, the Center Ice Hockey pro shop, 5 party/meeting rooms, seating for 300-400 observers and a heated café/observation area. The facility has been open since November 2002 when local High School and Youth Hockey teams started using it as a practice and game facility.

As Union County's only fully enclosed ice skating facility, the Arena offers a wide range of ice skating programs on a year-round basis. The programs currently available include Learn to Skate, Public Skating, Group Skating, Developmental Hockey Clinics, Freestyle Ice Time, Youth and Adult Open Hockey, Family Hockey, Summer Camps, Birthday Parties and Youth and Adult Hockey Leagues.

In addition to these programs, Union Sports Arena is the home ice facility for the Jersey Wildcats Junior hockey program, as well as the Governor Livingston High School, Jonathan Dayton High School and Watchung Hills High School hockey teams. Several other high schools, including Summit, Montville and Millburn, use Union Sports Arena as a practice facility. Starting in 2005, the NJ Devils Youth Hockey program is also conducting part of its program at Union Sports Arena. Lastly, Seton Hall University has recently begun calling Union Sports Arena "home".

For further information about Union Sports Arena and the programs that are offered, call 908-687-8610 or visit [www.unionsportsarena.com](http://www.unionsportsarena.com) on the web.