

A hockey league of their own

Downers men won't let disabilities sideline them

By Tim Egan

Downers Grove residents Mark Indreika and Brian Dusza just can't be kept away from a good game.

And their disabilities won't keep them from competing.

Indreika has arthro gryposis, a disease that has taken away the use of his arms. Dusza is affected by spina bifida.

"Having a disability, you're kind of delegated to the sideline," Indreika said. "You're left out."

Thanks to Indreika and Dusza, disabled adults with the will to play now have an outlet.

The two Downers Grove South High School graduates have put together the Disabled Athletes Floor Hockey League.

"Every year, Downers Grove South hosts a floor hockey tournament for the disabled," Indreika said. "That's basically where I got the idea from."

"The tournament itself is special. The kids take it pretty seriously. I lived for this tournament when I was in high school. It wasn't much to look at, but to the kids playing, it was the world."

Another reason behind a floor hockey league is to involve more people.

"Unlike wheelchair basketball," Indreika said, "floor hockey is much more accommodating to other types of disabilities. Our purpose was to create an all-inclusion league."

And when they hit the floor, they leave their disabilities in check.

"We all consider ourselves athletes," Indreika, a goalie, said. "We founded the league with the intention of playing a serious, competitive league."

The league will begin its regular season Thursday, Jan. 21, at Lakeview Junior High School in Downers Grove.

Four exhibition games already have been played in the two-team league that includes Glen Ellyn and Downers Grove.

"We hope to expand," Dusza said. "We're in our infancy. Hopefully, the league will grow."

The two teams will battle for the Steve Gluck Memorial Award. Gluck, who suffered from muscular dystrophy, lived in Hinsdale and passed away in 1988.

"Steve played in the tournament with us at South," Indreika said. "We're naming the trophy after him."

Dusza is a member of the Downers Grove team and the one who dubbed it the Granatos, after Tony Granato, Downers Grove resident and star of the National Hockey League's Los Angeles Kings.

"I love hockey," Dusza said, "and it's great to see somebody from a town like Downers Grove playing in a big-time sport. I've never met (Granato), but he's a great player."

It may not be the NHL, but with Dusza and Indreika's love of sport, the DAFHL is a lot more inspiring.

"It's a great opportunity for disabled people to play any type of sport," Dusza said. "Any time I get a chance to play, it's tremendous."



LIFE photo by Dennis Sieron

Spina bifida won't keep Brian Dusza away from his favorite game — hockey. The Downers Grove resident is a co-founder of a floor hockey league for people with disabilities.