

Muhlenberg ice hockey on ice forever?

Could Muhlenberg ice hockey return in some capacity?

By **Abe Shire** - October 10, 2024



The outside of the Life Sports Center. Photo credit to Muhlenberg's Zenfolio.

Once a Division II team, the Muhlenberg club ice hockey team was dismantled in 2017 to the great dismay of its players and supporters. It wasn't the end for just any organization on campus; terminating the team let down players who chose to attend Muhlenberg because it offered the opportunity to play, and it ruled out future students who eliminated Muhlenberg as a college option because it lacked an outlet to play hockey.

The team's legacy dates back to its first game in 1969 when it was classified as a Division II team. Budgetary constraints and tougher competition resulted in the downsizing of the team to a club, but the enthusiasm and dedication to the team did not diminish. What diminished was the college's commitment to and belief in having a hockey team, and in 2017 the team played its last game.

"The folks that played when I was there were committed to the game and having a good time," said Lyle Allan '73 in a 2017 [article](#) published by The Weekly. "We played ridiculously late hours and paid our own way. The school pretty much ignored us but I met a lot of great people." And nothing seems to have changed decades later, the article reported that the team still had little support from the College. According to the article, the program suffered a lack of commitment from the coaching staff in addition to a multitude of other issues including limited ice time, insecure and off-site storage for equipment and required player contributions of \$2,000 per season. It's no wonder the players were frustrated, yet the

school did not take responsibility. "Although I can completely understand why our students feel that way, the team being on hiatus this year is more about inadequate participation numbers than it is about coaching," justified Former Athletics Director Corey Goff, in the piece previously written on the hockey team. But the students felt duped. The barriers set up by the school prevented kids from coming out for the team, and it became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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During their college years, hockey enthusiasts Louis Cocco '23 and Joey Marcacci '23 spearheaded an effort to bring the team back. They ran into the same roadblocks with the College, but saw immense support from the student body, with their Instagram reaching 400 followers and a GoFundMe raising \$3,000 for rink rentals and jerseys. Both have since graduated, but when asked recently about the level of student interest they generated, Cocco reports that he and Marcacci enlisted a full roster of players, plus another 20 students who wanted to be team managers, assistants, social media contributors "and those were just people that signed up during the activities fair." They hosted two "Free Skate" nights at the local rink with a total turnout of over 100 people, and the owner of the rink, who was eager to bring Muhlenberg ice hockey back to the Lehigh Valley, threw in the ice time for free. Despite their valiant efforts, the school didn't commit to the team. With no other option, Cocco and Marcacci joined a league in Bethlehem where dozens of their fellow students regularly made the trek to watch them play. Support from the student body remained constant. "With proper marketing and a team full of Muhlenberg athletes, I think we would have had tons of Muhlenberg students and Muhlenberg community members in the stands at our games if Muhlenberg Ice Hockey had been supported," lamented Cocco. The money they raised still sits in a Muhlenberg ice hockey bank account owned by the college.

When asked if there are any plans to reinstate hockey as a school sport, the Associate Director of Athletics Megan Patruno, responded "I'm not sure I can say that there are 'plans' to reinstate hockey. We are not opposed to it. Clubs and organizations at Muhlenberg are driven by students and student interest. If/when there is student interest again, we will work with students to guide them through the process of establishing a club." A survey of other small-to-medium-sized private universities in Pennsylvania delivered some surprising results; Lafayette, Bucknell, Lehigh, Villanova and Gettysburg all have ice hockey programs. Additionally, there are over 460 colleges around the country with club hockey programs, indicating a strong interest in ice hockey by student bodies and reciprocal accommodation by school administrations.

Now that the local rink has closed and Cocco and Marcacci, the champions of reestablishing a Muhlenberg Ice Hockey team, have graduated, a return to the glory days of Muhlenberg Ice Hockey will not be an easy journey. Given the right combination of student involvement and administration willingness though, it's a possibility, and thanks to Cocco and Marcacci, there is also an earmarked bank account with a healthy balance to provide a jump start.