

Hockey on sleds to help teen

Ex-Naperville North student was paralyzed in Wisconsin crash

By Harry Hitzeman

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Anthony Regole's life changed quicker than a slap shot.

The 16-year-old former Cyclones Hockey player and Naperville resident was driving back from ice fishing on Jan. 7 with two friends in northern Wisconsin when he hit a patch of black ice, spun out and struck a tree.

His two friends walked away from the crash, but Regole, a junior at Naperville North High School who recently transferred to a Wisconsin high school over winter break so he could enjoy the outdoors more, wasn't as lucky.

He is now paralyzed from the waist down from the crash, in which no drugs or alcohol were involved.

Regole's father, Michael, recalled talking with his son after he was airlifted to Saint Joseph's Hospital in Marshfield.

"He looked at me and said 'Dad, I'm pretty messed up,'" Michael said. "I said, 'Yeah, you are.' And he said, 'But I can still fish and I can learn to play sled hockey.'"

On March 3, the Fox Valley Ice Arena in Geneva will be the host site of a fundraiser featuring teams of disabled hockey players who use "sleds" against local skaters, who also will sit on sleds.

This variation of hockey was invented at a Swedish rehabilitation center in the 1960s by a group that wanted to continue playing. The men modified a metal frame sled, or sledge, with two regular-sized ice-hockey skate blades, according to the Web site www.usahockey.com. Players use two short sticks instead of one, and it is now an event in the Paralympic Winter Games.

Dan and Lauren Galardini worked as co-organizers of the benefit. Dan Galardini, a Batavia resident, recalled Michael and Gretchen Regole's commitment to coaching with the Cyclones Amateur Hockey Association and said this was the least they could do.

"I think the key message here from my perspective is it is not only going to raise money for Anthony, but we need to raise awareness of situations like this through sled hockey. Once (disabled people) get through the tough times, the world doesn't end," Galardini said. "There is life after a situation like this."

Galardini said there will be a variety of activities, including two raffles for a Nintendo Wii game system and a weeklong stay at a Mexico resort. Donations from hockey teams and associations have streamed in unsolicited after learning of Regole's fate, he said.

The exhibition game will start at noon at the arena, 1996 S. Kirk Road, Geneva. Doors open at 11:30 a.m. Admission is free, but donations are encouraged. For more information, call (630) 220-7825.

Tax-deductible donations also may be made to the Anthony Regole Foundation, Attn: Anthony Nasharr, Two Prudential Plaza, 180 N. Stetson Ave., Suite 4525, Chicago, 60601.

Anthony Regole is still rehabbing at the Craig Hospital in Denver, which is dedicated to rehabilitation for patients with spinal cord injury or traumatic brain injury. His family hopes he can return to Naperville in late March or early April.

Michael Regole, a carpenter by trade, said he will begin retrofitting his home to accommodate a wheelchair today.

“(Anthony is) doing OK. We’ve got to figure out a different way to go about life now,” Michael said. “I wish I could say enough about the support from the hockey community, but I don’t know how many words could explain it.”

Katie Biggs, an English teacher at Naperville North, taught Regole his freshman and junior years.

She said he enjoyed hockey, but his true passion was anything outdoors, namely fishing and hunting. After debating whether to move north to live with family friends, he decided to move after writing a compare-and-contrast paper about Wisconsin versus the Chicago suburbs.

“The part that makes it so incredibly sad is his dream was finally coming true. He was finally in Wisconsin. He was in the place he wanted to be,” Biggs said. “He is an incredibly sweet kid, very loyal and a great friend to his peers.”