

At the Top of Their Game

Four Northeast Passage athletes earn Paralympic Games gold in sled hockey

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DAVID EUSTACE OF NORTHEAST PASSAGE CARRIES THE PUCK BEHIND THE NET FOR THE U.S. SLED HOCKEY TEAM DURING PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES ACTION IN BEIJING THIS MONTH. FOUR NORTHEAST PASSAGE ATHLETES WERE PART OF TEAM USA'S GOLD MEDAL-WINNING SQUAD - EUSTACE, NOAH GROVE, GRIFFIN LAMARRE AND KYLE ZYCH. (COURTESY PHOTO)

The U.S. Paralympic sled hockey team celebrated a gold medal four-peat at the Paralympic Winter Games earlier this month, and no college had more representation in Beijing – among all U.S. Paralympian athletes, let alone those on the sled hockey roster –

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than the University of New Hampshire.

Four Northeast Passage program athletes — David Eustace, Noah Grove, Griffin LaMarre and Kyle Zych — helped Team USA earn its fourth consecutive gold medal on the ice with a 5-0 victory over Canada in the championship game.

Grove was a student at UNH from 2017 to 2019, but all four have taken part in the Northeast Passage sled hockey program for several years.

“I think our success is the result of our commitment to providing opportunities and getting people into the sport but also not losing focus of the competitive side,” Matthew McGilvray, competitive sports coordinator for Northeast Passage, says. “A lot of programs are kind of one or the other – either recreational or competitive – but we try really hard to get people started and develop a path and also give players opportunities at the highest level possible, just like any other able-bodied sport.”

Being part of a four-time gold medal winner brings a little superstar cache, as the Northeast Passage quartet has discovered. Among the acknowledgements received during and after the tournament were a Twitter shoutout from the Boston Bruins and a video message recorded by Bruins goalie Jeremy Swayman on the same platform – both of which identified all four athletes by name.



THE NORTHEAST PASSAGE REPRESENTATIVES ON THE U.S. PARALYMPIC SLED HOCKEY TEAM. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Since returning home they've also been flooded with attention and

requests to attend events or otherwise show off the fruits of their labor.

“It’s dreams becoming reality,” McGilvray says. “Feeling that kind of love on social media, I think it meant a lot to these guys. And now they’re seeing the support when they came home from all their families and friends – honestly, I think they’re kind of overwhelmed, with everyone asking them to go to this or that event and wanting to see the gold medals. I think they feel like they’re celebrities. They’re certainly soaking it all in, and they’re appreciative of everything that has gone in to getting them to that stage.”

The Northeast Passage connection to Team USA sled hockey runs deep. At least one athlete from the program has been on every U.S. Paralympic roster since Team USA began competing in sled hockey, starting in 1998 in Nagano, Japan. That’s an impressive lineage of UNH connections.

“I think that focus we have here to provide that pipeline and all the resources at UNH and throughout the whole process is really what has allowed us to have all that success,” McGilvray says.

The Northeast Passage program, a nonprofit service/research program of UNH’s recreation management and policy department in the College of Health and Human Services, was created in part to “empower people living with disabling conditions, both visible and invisible, to define, pursue and achieve whole life health, community engagement and fulfillment through the purposeful use of sports and recreation.”

Opportunities like those created for the members of the sled hockey team have certainly made a lifelong impact on the athletes, who are appreciative of the balance McGilvray highlighted between access at a young age and the chance to compete at a high level as they develop.

“Being able to have a structured youth program, intermediate program and then working our way up and always competing in collegiate leagues because of the opportunities they’ve given us has really helped us grow into the players we need to be,” LaMarre told Stuart Lieberman in a [story on the Team USA website](#).

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