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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Release 17-06-19/001
June 19, 2017

AFTAC hockey skates against Sheriff's Office 'Enforcers' for charity

By Susan A. Romano, AFTAC Public Affairs

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Airman Battle Uniforms and Sheriff's Greens were replaced by skates, pads and jerseys as members of the Air Force Technical Applications Center went head-to-head against the Brevard County Sheriff's Office in a charity hockey game June 10, 2017.

With more than 200 spectators packing the stands, AFTAC and BCSO took to the ice to raise money and awareness for the Space Coast Hurricanes Sled Hockey team. Sled hockey is a sport designed to allow participants with a physical disability play a sit-down version of the game.



Players use a sled with a seat bolted to a metal frame with two blades underneath while they grasp two shortened hockey sticks in each hand. On one end of the sticks, there are two stainless steel picks the players use to propel themselves across the ice, while the other end has a standard stick blade used to move the puck.

"What's cool about sled hockey is that it gives people with physical limitations the opportunity to play this great game," said AFTAC forward Rob McLaughlin. "It's a full-contact sport with the same rules as stand-up hockey. The only real difference is it's played on a sled. And having played regular hockey for many years, I can tell you it's a LOT harder to skate sitting down using just your upper body strength to get from one end of the ice to another. The guys who play this sport really amaze me!"

The two teams battled at Space Coast IcePlex in Rockledge, Fla. Prior to the start of the game, Sheriff Wayne Ivey and Col. Steve Gorski, AFTAC's commander, dropped ceremonial pucks in a face-off between AFTAC team captain Bill Hungate and BCSO's captain Brad Cervi. Rob Medina, director of Military and Community Relations for Congressman Bill Posey, presented a symbolic pre-game ticket sales check in the amount of \$1,250.

Once the ceremonial formalities were complete, the official puck was dropped and the game was underway. AFTAC quickly scored first, and posted another goal on the scoreboard before the Enforcers were able to sneak the puck past AFTAC goalie Scott Barnikow. By the end of the first period, the score remained close at 3-1.

The second period saw the introduction of sled hockey player Greg Shaw, a two-time Olympic gold medalist and three-time world champion sled hockey defenseman. The Merritt Island, Fla., native skated with the Enforcers and made it look easy to everyone in the crowd.

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“I was blown away by him being out there with the upright players,” said AFTAC fan Kathy Querry. “I could not get over the fact that he was able to keep up and be a part of the play and how he lifted himself and his sled off the ice during line changes. That takes an enormous amount of skill, strength and talent!”



It wasn't until the third period that the game really opened up. Despite the established “no contact” rule agreed upon by the two teams, Cervi and AFTAC defenseman Ronnie Grove engaged in some friendly (and most likely pre-coordinated) fisticuffs to excite the crowd and generate a healthy rivalry. AFTAC slipped three more pucks past the Enforcer's goaltender, posting a final score of 6-1.

“What a great way to get agency partners together for a great cause,” said Ivey. “I've said time and again that it takes a community to protect a community, and I'm proud to see the incredible turn out here tonight.”

AFTAC's commander echoed Ivey's sentiment.

“Events like this illustrate just what health, friendly competition is all about,” said Gorski. “Fans are treated to a fun afternoon, players bond on and off the ice, and funds are raised for a very worthy cause. In the end, both AFTAC and BCSO help keep America safe. I'm honored to be a part of this community.”

Eliot Lemoncelli, an Orlando resident who's been playing sled hockey since 2010, makes the 160-mile round trip drive every week to participate in the sport he fell in love with more than seven years ago after watching a sled hockey scrimmage following an Orlando Solar Bears game.

“I'm looking around and as long as I have been coming here, I have never seen the stands so full of people!” Lemoncelli exclaimed. “I mean, you could add up all parents and friends I've seen sitting here all year and it still wouldn't equal how many are in the stands tonight. I love it that the Air Force and the Sheriffs are playing to raise money for our league. That is just so awesome. It makes me feel really good!”

After the game, the two teams came together for a group photo, and Hungate announced they raised an additional \$1,483 from souvenirs, at-the-door ticket sales and raffle drawings, which when added to the pre-ticket revenue, totaled \$2,733 for the sled hockey program.

“It is hard for me to express how proud we are to be a part of this great community event to raise awareness of the Space Coast Sled Hockey Program,” said Hungate. “To be on the ice with Greg Shaw was an honor for me, and by far the best part of the game. I hope this serves as a spark for others to become involved with this program.”

He added, “We would also like to thank our community leaders for taking the time to support us both on and off the ice. It demonstrates through their actions that they are dedicated to our cause and that means a lot to everyone involved.”