

Sledge hockey comes to Orangeville

By Brian Lockhart

It is a sport that allows people with disabilities to get out on the ice and play some hockey.

Sledge hockey has been around for a while, and thanks to a local player and the Orangeville Accessibility Committee, the sport is now available in Orangeville.

Sledge hockey is played on a sledge with two skate blades beneath a seat. The players are strapped into their seats and use picks at the bottom of shortened hockey sticks to propel themselves across the ice.

The rules are pretty much the same as regular ice hockey; the notable exception is a penalty for 'T-boning' someone on the ice.

While T-boning is against the rules, it still happens, especially during competitive matches when skilled players make tight turns on the ice.

There are competitive leagues in different towns and cities in Ontario. Not all players are disabled. Some able-bodied individuals enjoy the sport as well. With everyone in a sledge, things on the ice even out.

Area resident Rob Jeffery, who has a prosthetic leg, was instrumental in bringing the sport to Orangeville.

'I did a small dry-land demonstration in front of the Accessibility Committee,' Jeffery explained. 'After I had my leg amputated, I was still trying to find my way. I had friends, you become part of a community, and they said, 'why don't you come and play hockey? I looked up sledge hockey, and I came out to their games and thought 'I could do that.' It really brought me to the game that I loved as a kid.'

Jeffery had played hockey before, both at the minor and senior levels.

'I play in a league with the Ontario Sledge Hockey Association, it's all across Ontario,' Jeffery said. 'They have different divisions, teams, and clubs. My team plays out of Markham.'

The Town took a real interest in sledge hockey as part of its efforts to make facilities and sports in the area accessible and inclusive.

The Town purchased 10 sledges, which are available for residents to use free of charge at the Alder Street Arena.

Orangeville Mayor Lisa Post, Councillor Joe Anderson, and Accessibility Committee members James Jackson and Rick Ugolini formalized the launch of sledge hockey on Orangeville ice and gave members of the public a chance to try sledge hockey at a special announcement at the Alder Street Arena on Saturday, October 25.