



University of  
Lethbridge

**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Powerchair hockey tournament coming to the University of Lethbridge**

Powerchair athletes will descend on Lethbridge for the first-ever Alberta Powerchair Hockey Tournament at the University of Lethbridge's Centre for Sport and Wellness from Aug. 8 to 10.



Chase Petruska (BSc '23, MSc '24), a doctoral student studying neuroscience under Dr. Gerlinde Metz, has organized the tournament, and he expects 32 athletes with physical disabilities from Grand Prairie, Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and Ontario will participate in the tournament. Hosted at the University of Lethbridge, the tournament is being run by the Lethbridge

Powerchair Sports Association. The Calgary Flames and the Lethbridge Hurricanes are supporting the tournament by supplying jerseys for two teams each, as well as MVP awards, like signed game pucks and water bottles. The Calgary Powerchair Hockey League and the Alberta Cerebral Palsy Sports Association are also behind the tournament as they endeavour to grow the sport of powerchair hockey.

Petruska became interested in powerchair sports because he wanted to help his brother, who has cerebral palsy. His brother plays in the Calgary Power Hockey League, which Petruska coaches. Seeing his brother and the other players smiling, laughing and having a good time inspired him to conduct research into finding ways to support people with physical disabilities in participating in team sports.

He established the Lethbridge Powersoccer Program nearly four years ago, after his research found that individuals with physical disabilities were more susceptible to stressful situations like social isolation.

“Since starting up Lethbridge Powerchair Soccer and while coaching powerchair hockey in Calgary, I’ve seen players gain confidence, form close friendships, and feel a stronger sense of purpose and inclusion,” says Petruska. “Team sports can offer life-changing benefits for people who are often excluded from traditional athletics. One of the biggest inspirations for me is seeing these players come out every week, and, even with all the adversity they have to battle through, their faces still light up with joy whenever they make a save, a block, a pass or score a goal.”

Petruska plans to conduct research on the tournament to examine the immediate effects of powerchair sports as part of his PhD thesis. Along with collecting heart rate data and saliva and urine samples, the athletes will be asked to complete a questionnaire to assess how powerchair sports affect their stress levels, mood, social well-being and physiological responses. The goal is to deepen understanding of how adaptive team sports influence the mental, social, and biological health of individuals with physical disabilities.

In his previous research, Petruska has found heartening results. A study soon to be published, which examined the impact of powerchair sports over four months of participation, revealed a trend in increased social support and a significant metabolomic change with promising biological markers for positive social support and mental health outcomes.

The findings are confirmed by what Petruska sees on the court and the possibilities he envisions for powerchair sports.

“Seeing every player’s resilience, how they work together, encourage one another, and help each other grow both on and off the court, has made a significant impact on me,” he says. “As a result, we’ve begun expanding to other sports through my non-profit Lethbridge Powerchair Sports Association. We are running powerchair hockey in the fall, soccer in the spring and boccia in the summer. All events will be hosted at the University of Lethbridge and directly tied to my research.”

The tournament begins Friday, Aug. 8, with an optional practice at 4 p.m., dinner from 5 to 6 p.m. and the first game at 6 p.m. between the Flames and Blasty. The tournament continues Saturday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. The finals are scheduled for Sunday, with the gold medal game from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. All games will be held in the north gym at the Centre for Sport and Wellness.

[Read online.](#)

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**Contact:**

Caroline Zentner, public affairs advisor  
University of Lethbridge  
403-394-3975 or 403-795-5403 (cell)

[caroline.zentner@uleth.ca](mailto:caroline.zentner@uleth.ca)

*Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.*