

AT Banter Podcast Episode 307 - Canadian Blind Hockey

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SPEAKERS

Steve Barclay, Lis Malone, Graham Foxcroft, Rob Mineault, Luca DeMontis, Ryan Fleury

R Rob Mineault 00:31

Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.

S Steve Barclay 02:19

Banter, banter.

R Rob Mineault 02:26

Hey, this is of course the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault. And joining me today we have a full roster here we have Mr. Steve Barclay.

S Steve Barclay 02:48

Hey, that's actually me

R Rob Mineault 02:50

And we have Mr. Ryan Fleury.

R Ryan Fleury 02:53

That's right wing to you.

R

Rob Mineault 02:55

And our center .. Lis Malone.

L

Lis Malone 03:01

Center of what?

R

Rob Mineault 03:03

I don't know. Is that a thing or not?

L

Lis Malone 03:05

I love making him doubt himself.

R

Rob Mineault 03:14

It's true. Anyways, I How are you guys today? How's my team doing?

L

Lis Malone 03:24

Do you know what today is?

R

Rob Mineault 03:26

Today, no. I have no idea.

L

Lis Malone 03:31

it's a big day today is the official opening day of hockey season NHL season

R

Rob Mineault 03:37

Really?

L

Lis Malone 03:37

Yes. I really I am missing a game right now to do this show, that's how dedicated I am.

 Rob Mineault 03:44

Wait they're already playing? You mean like they've already like started, it isn't like one of those exhibition things?

 Lis Malone 03:50

No, no, no, there's a there's a real game on that I can I'm trying to every now and then I lean forward just to see if I can oh really something. We're in we are officially in hockey season.

 Rob Mineault 04:01

See and I feel like it was just last week when I was just like okay, that's it. I guess the Colorado Avalanche won ... is that right? They won the Stanley Cup? Stop laughing.

 Lis Malone 04:27

And here we are again. Another season that's that's funny how that happens right?

 Rob Mineault 04:31

Yeah, that's right. It's so this is the 2023 seasons kicking off today?

 Lis Malone 04:35

Yes.

 Rob Mineault 04:36

Well, that's a very exciting Well, let's let the listeners know why the heck that is like a little bit of synergy because what the heck are we doing today? Ryan, how about you tell us what, what we're doing today and why it kind of lines up with with hockey season starting?

 Ryan Fleury 05:10

Well, that was a bit of a surprise to me. I didn't know today was the official opening day of NHL hockey, but here it is. What a coincidence. So today's show we have from the Canadian Blind Hockey Association, Luca DeMontis. Hello, Luca.

L Luca DeMontis 05:27

How's it going? Thanks for having us.

R Ryan Fleury 05:31

No problem at all. Also joining us from our very own Vancouver Eclipse Blind Hockey team, Graham Foxcroft. Welcome, Graham.

G Graham Foxcroft 05:41

Hey, thanks for having me, guys. Ladies.

L Lis Malone 05:45

Thank you.

R Ryan Fleury 05:46

She's one of the guys.

R Rob Mineault 05:50

Yeah, we couldn't afford another locker room. So it's co-ed locker rooms here. Okay, well listen, with everybody's very excited about having you guys on. So why don't we just start with maybe each of you guys giving us a little bit of background on each of you, and a little bit of background about the organization.

L Luca DeMontis 06:14

Alright, so as I mentioned, yeah, my name is Luca Democritus. I'm the Program Director of Canadian Blind Hockey, and the general manager of our Canadian National Blind Hockey team. I've had the privilege and the honor of holding this role for a few years now and working with this amazing community from athletes across this country. And we've had the joy of now showcasing the sport, and this fast growing pair of sport around the world. So Canadian Blood Hockey is a national sports organization for the para-sport of Blind Hockey in Canada. Through our "learn to skate" field trip programs, our development camps are regional tournaments, and our flagship Canadian National Blind Hockey tournament, we create the paraspot and Blind Hockey and make programming accessible for children, youth and adults who are blind or partially sighted from across this country. So it's something that's truly remarkable to see when you see a child get on the ice for the very first time. Or if you see somebody who's a little bit older take part in a tournament, and when they get their very first medal, feeling that acceptance of being part of a team and sharing the same camaraderie and sharing the same dream of one day, wanting to win a medal as part of a group is so important. But it's bigger than that, what we truly believe we believe just being part of a team. And having that

community, especially in the disabled community with visual impairment. Graham could touch on this a little bit more. But these are unique individuals that have fought and battle so much adversity in life. So to get them all in a room, a change room, as you just alluded to a little bit earlier, you hear so many different stories of courage. And each of those stories definitely hold its own weight. And I like to think every player in our community such as Graham today is an ambassador to share the sport and create more awareness for the sport because their stories are what make our sport so special. So that's just a little bit about Canadian Blind Hockey, I'm sure over the next little bit here today, we'll be able to provide you all with some more information about how we play the sport, how we make it inclusive, and more importantly, how we love the game that many know as Canada's national game and how we have fun with it right?

G

Graham Foxcroft 08:16

The point is fun. I'm Graham, I'm with the Vancouver Eclipse Blind Hockey team. I'm the chair of the team. So I kind of organize and run everything that we do, run our fundraisers and stuff. We're Program of BC Blind Sports. So they help us out with our ice times and stuff like that. We also get funding from Lions Club. They bought us a couple of sets of jerseys over the years and things like that. Our program runs basically through September to the end of March. And we play once a week, at the North Surrey sports and ice complex. And we're there every Sunday at 10:45 on the ice. Steve, you're more than welcome to come out and visit and cheer us on because we'd love an audience. We don't get many out there. But one guy would help, I'm sure.

S

Steve Barclay 09:11

I can yell enough for two.

G

Graham Foxcroft 09:13

perfect. And yeah, we also have ice time on Fridays kind of every second Friday, like twice a month. We're doing basically from now until the end of March as well. If you're anyone's interested in learning Blind Hockey, we're here to help learn and teach and go through things. If you need equipment, we could figure that out. Yeah, so that's kind of us for the Eclipse Blind Hockey team.

R

Rob Mineault 09:42

So maybe we could we could start by just for people who are who may be listening who aren't familiar with Blind Hockey, can you kind of step us through some of the ways that the game is adapted?

G

Graham Foxcroft 09:56

Sure. We use a A metal puck it's about five centimeters across wide and about two centimeters high. It's got ball bearings on the inside. So it's a little bit bigger and a little bit heavier than a

sign, it's got ball bearings on the inside. So it's a little bit bigger moves a little bit slower than a regular puck, our nets are a foot smaller than the average net, because the goalies are blind in blind hockey. In tournaments, they have to wear eye shades. But when we play, we don't worry about it too much. So the nets are a foot smaller, there's a one pass rule that we have to do once you cross over into the offensive zone. And that part is the inclusiveness of playing hockey, everyone gets a chance to touch the puck. But that's really for the goalies to kind of navigate themselves and know where their play is. So it alerts them to that the play might be coming from the left. And once that pass whistle goes, then we're able to make a shot. So those are kind of the rules. Do I miss anything Luca?

L

Luca DeMontis 10:57

No, you definitely touched on them great, described the well. I think just one thing to touch on is that how important these adaptations have been. And the biggest thing about the adaptations is myself at Canadian Blind Hockey, and our Executive Director Matt Morrow, we believe in listening to the community. So when we first created the rule of taking off the top foot of the net, it was with a lot of conversations with the goalies. We listened to them that when the puck is traveling in the air, it's hard to hear it. So if we can help them by taking off that top foot, we were able to kind of minimize high scoring games, which makes it a lot more fair and level the playing field across the board. So we've always taken the consideration, the comments, the suggestions from our community, because they are the most important stakeholders in this in this industry, in this game. We build the game around them, right? One of the coolest things I love to see was the one pass rule, right, we do have players in this community that can go from behind their net, and to the other end and put on a highlight goal. However, it doesn't include their teammates. And we were big believers of including everybody on the ice. So it makes that one pass so much more important. And when you see a player celebrate for their first goal or their first assist in their life. It's magical, right. And I truly believe that the adaptations are so important to the game. But along with that we can continue to keep making adaptations. A safety adaptation is no player is allowed in the crease because the goalie are completely blind and blindfolded. We don't want anybody falling all over them, right and anything like that.

G

Graham Foxcroft 12:33

So we talk when the puck is in the blue, it's also frozen as well, because the goalie might not be able to find it or see it. So if it's hits the goalie and falls into the blue, then it's a frozen Puck, like he made the save. So that's another big update adaptations for sure.

S

Steve Barclay 12:48

So it's treated the same as if he covered it up.

G

Graham Foxcroft 12:51

Exactly,

L

Luca DeMontis 12:52

And that's safety, right safety 100% in anything we do. That's one of the main items we look at whenever we are creating a new rule and adaptation, or anything in terms of the game, we want to make it as safe as possible.

G

Graham Foxcroft 13:06

Now as a forward, I hate that pass rule because I can't make a good defensive play at the blue line and screw up the net and score on the net because I have to wait for a teammate to catch up to me to make that pass. So as a forward center, I personally don't like that rule, but I understand why it's there.

L

Luca DeMontis 13:26

So now that we all know that Graham is a forward.

R

Rob Mineault 13:32

Okay, so so I'm gonna I'm just gonna play the role of the clueless listener that maybe not not knowing anything about hockey, but so could you explain what you mean when you say it's a one pass? The one pass rule, does that mean that you can't shoot on the net unless you pass it to somebody?

L

Luca DeMontis 13:53

For a clueless listener you got the nail right on the head. So let's say your team is attacking. And now you pass the opposition's blue line. Before you are allowed to shoot the puck on net, you must make one successful pass to your teammate. That pass cannot hit the opposition's foot stick. Any part of their equipment must be successful pass tape to tape or tape to motherboard around the boards. The player could receive it on their foot. It's got to be a direct pass to your teammate. Once that passes made, the referee will then indicate that the past is good by blowing a high pitch whistle. That high pitch whistle that indicates as Graham mentioned, mostly to the defensive team, the goalie that now a shot is allowed to happen on me the other team is allowed to score, right. If a player shoots the puck on the net, and there is no past made, play will be blown dead and the face off will be taken all the way down to their zone or outside the blue I think isn't it offside? Yeah, so it It's, it's exciting to see because it's the one thing that people that traditional hockey doesn't have that we have with our sport, right? A lot of friends, whenever they come to a tournament or whenever they come to a game, they they like to see that because I commend a lot of our players, you see some highlight reel one passes that lead to some incredible goals, right, and that it's a testament to the camaraderie, but also to the testament of the skill of these athletes, despite being visually impaired. So it's cool to see from from somebody with vision, who watches a lot of Blind Hockey, to see that one pass being made, and to see how creative these players are getting as the sport does develop.

R

Ryan Fleury 15:41

And this is Ryan, I followed the sport a little bit over the past few years. And I can definitely attest to the pace of the game, because you guys have also had and may still do have players who played in World Junior Hockey, and have just lost their sight due to whatever circumstances so there is some high level skill there for sure.

L

Luca DeMontis 16:00

Yeah, we have some incredible stories of some players that played in the, in the queue, some players that played Junior B in Ontario, also in the BCHL. And, you know, despite these life altering conditions, they're still playing the game they love, and they're not letting their disability stop them from doing that. And, and even somebody like Graham Foxcroft, Graham, you can touch on this a little bit for how long you've been playing and that you have for the game, right? I can't remember there being an event that Graham hasn't attended in Canadian Blind Hockey history, right. So that's not only a testament to him, but it's a testament to all the players in this community, how dedicated they are, to take part in something that they truly love. Right. I think that's remarkable for any individual. And even more remarkable for someone with a disability where there may be used to hearing that sorry, you can't participate in this or sorry, there's no room to participate in this event or despite your visual impairment. We can't adapt or modify this exercise for you. When here we're willing to modify and adapt and and listen, I think is very important, as Graham mentioned, most important, have fun, right? If you're going to have fun taking part in blind hockey, I can promise you you will. You'll want to come back. And that's a testament for anything you do when you have fun. You want to continue to do it.

L

Lis Malone 17:14

Can you guys tell me again, what the dimensions are of the puck that you use?

L

Luca DeMontis 17:19

Yeah, for sure. Definitely. So our puck, I'm going to touch on it a little bit. So we try to describe it as the size of an old wagon wheel. Right for individuals that have a wagon. For individuals that have maybe a barbecue, it's the size of a barbecue wheel, however it is made of stainless steel, I believe it's four times larger Graham, you can correct me on that wrong,

G

Graham Foxcroft 17:45

I think so.

L

Luca DeMontis 17:46

Of a traditional puck, so it is bigger. The steel along with the bearings inside the puck do allow for the hollowness of it to rattle around which makes the noise for the players with a visual

for the hollowness of it to track around which makes the noise for the players with a visual impairment to track it on the ice. Okay, pucks are expensive, and pucks because the fact that they are hollow, they do get beaten up in a game. So there are certain games where we might go through a couple of pucks because when the puck gets beaten up the hollowness, it starts to create dents and the dents then don't allow the ball bearings to fully track around the surface. So it doesn't appear as loud for the goalies and players. So there's been games where we've had to use a couple different pucks before.

 Graham Foxcroft 18:29

It's about five inches across. It's about two inches high. So you know, like a salmon can a big salmon can or big tuna can kind of thing is how I describe it as well.

 Lis Malone 18:42

Yeah, I mean, that's actually to me still pretty small because like a normal regulation hockey puck for anyone who doesn't know and sometimes you don't know, the size of the actual hockey puck, because when you're when you see people playing unless you actually hold one. You're, I mean, I have I have one from the last game that I went to and the first thing I said oh my god, oh, you're you forget how small they are and how fast it moves and then adding that that additional element of having the vision impairment and being able and tracking it, it's, it's it is really not very easy to do even for sighted people so it's it's extremely impressive to even fathom to do you know, playing the game even in this adaptive way. I mean it's it's I that's what I personally love about hockey. The sport itself is because you have to be talented in so many different areas. You have to be really strong on the ice obviously and then you have to be able to maneuver strategically and be able to do things like you said like the passing and being able to take shots on goal. So I think it's I am super impressed and I I wish I lived closer so I can go to games myself.

 Graham Foxcroft 20:02

Well, there's hockey in the USA as well, right? Blind hockey. They've expanded and grown it out there. So there's hockey in the US for sure.

 Steve Barclay 20:11

They don't invite me. So.

 Luca DeMontis 20:13

What area do you live in?

 Lis Malone 20:15

I'm in Charlotte. North Carolina.

L

Luca DeMontis 20:16

Okay. Pretty cool. Yeah. Nice. One other adaptation I just remembered. And Graham, you can touch on this for sure, is our yellow jerseys.

G

Graham Foxcroft 20:26

Oh, yeah. The yellow jerseys for sure they, because of some people's vision, they can't see like a black or a white very well in the White will blend into the ice. So we found out that most visions can see yellow fairly well. So that's why we, the home team, one is yellow one is dark, right. So our team in Vancouver, we got a blue and a yellow home jersey. So that's a big adaptation. So all the teams can see equally as as equal as can be right.

R

Rob Mineault 20:59

So I just want to go back to talking about the puck really briefly. Because I'm sitting here in my living room, and I've got my balcony right beside me and I've got my barbecue out there. And I'm looking at the wheel and I'm picturing that on the ice filled with ball bearings. And I'm you mentioned that you know that that puck still can go into the air .. like is there still like slap shots and stuff that?

G

Graham Foxcroft 21:28

No slap shots. But it is very easy to get it raised with a wrist shot. That is one rule as well. No slap shots, because it's a metal clock and it's hard. So you're not allowed to have a slap shot.

L

Luca DeMontis 21:44

We also don't want you to break your stick the way they cost and how expensive they are nowadays.

R

Rob Mineault 21:49

Well, that's actually an interesting idea. So so the sticks are still just regulation hockey sticks, normal hockey sticks?

L

Luca DeMontis 21:56

Correct.

L

Lis Malone 21:59

And do you guys do? Do you have different penalties, like do you do powerplays?

L

Luca DeMontis 22:06

It's it's, yeah, it's the exact same game of hockey that we're all excited to watch tonight as the season opens up. Aside from those few minor adaptations, you'll hear the exact same chirps between a bench the referees get treated the same. So yeah, it's hockey, there's penalties, there's power plays. It's a fast, exciting game. One thing I could strongly encourage is if anybody has never seen the sport of blind hockey, or heard about it, check us out on social media right across from Instagram, Twitter, even our YouTube channel, we love broadcasting all our games, this really allows the players to feel as professional as possible. So they get to share these broadcast links with their families back home and get to watch them partake in the sport that they love to travel and compete in. So yeah, a lot of our gameplay from our national tournaments or Eastern Regional or Western Regional tournaments are all archived on our YouTube channel. So I'd strongly suggest taking some time and watching some blind hockey and seeing how talented these athletes truly are.

G

Graham Foxcroft 23:07

And I went in my hockey bag, and I got a puck out, so I'm just gonna rattle it so you guys can hear how loud it can be. It's actually a brand new puck, I'm pretty surprised that there's no dents in it at all.

L

Lis Malone 23:25

We have all these understudies tonight.

R

Rob Mineault 23:31

So I'm kind of, I'm wondering what, what kind of a how you kind of manage the different sort of players skills? How does that sort of work in terms of the teams, because it seems to me that because vision is so much of a gradient. So you're going to have people who are on all different, different levels. But at this, but as well, you're also going to have different sort of like, say skating ability, for example, you might have somebody who was a very strong skater when they were sighted. But then they lost their sight and they're sort of adapting from that direction. And then you also might have somebody who is, say, more, you know, has had low vision or blindness for longer, but they're sort of new to skating. So how do you kind of balance all that? Are there different divisions that you can place people in? How does that all work?

L

Luca DeMontis 24:30

There is definitely different divisions. That's more of an organization kind of outlook and what we do there and it all goes back to our incredible volunteers. So across the country, we've got

amazing volunteers at every program. Both of these volunteers, somebody like Graham, without vision, and then we do have some volunteers that are sighted, right? And what we asked truly from them is how they grade their players right? They see them more often than we do they play with them more often than we ever can see them. And we tried to make the tournament as thorough as possible in terms of these, but you did touch on a couple remarkable things there. Yeah, we do have some players in our community that were very good hockey players when they were younger and had vision. So now a lot of them are adapting to the Blind Hockey game, adapting to a bigger Puck, a slower game, a smaller net, and all that, right. So it does have its challenges. But we tried to make the sport and all the teams as fair as possible, we got a great Organizing Committee, great volunteers that help with their input, we do share the teams a few times before we promote them, and share them with the community. And that's probably one of the most exciting days I think, and and Graham could talk about that is tournament time is when everybody gets to find out who's on their team, right. And it's a mix of skill, it's a mix of visual impairment, but the only one thing that they do share in common, other than being visually impaired is their love for the game and for partaking in the event. So I like to think Facebook should give us a little bit of credit during those days when we do launch our teams because definitely the message boards and the direct messages, everybody's full of excitement just communicating with each other and how happy they are to be teammates with one another.

G

Graham Foxcroft 26:08

And in the tournaments, we're playing with teams from across like players from across the country, we're not playing as our own teams. And there's a rating system we kind of go by the Paralympic rating system like B1, B2, and B3s even include some of the B4s like myself in there kind of thing. So we use that rating system that the Paralympics do a little bit and obviously skill from each player and team so depends on the skill level of that player and their ability. But a lot of people just pick up skating -- it's more their fitness that isn't quite there compared to knowing what they're doing. And then once they get the fitness up, then they become a better skater as well.

R

Ryan Fleury 26:50

So I was reading on the website Luca about, I guess there's some differences in vision requirements between recreational hockey and competitive hockey. Can you talk a little bit about what those differences are?

L

Luca DeMontis 27:03

Yeah, for sure. So some of the differences are, as Graham just mentioned, is the International Blind Sports Association classification system. So in international Blind Sports, for example, we have an upcoming series of Canada Vs. USA. All athletes will be officially IBSA classified. And that means that they will either be a B1 with 0% vision, a B2, which is one to 5% vision, or a B3, which is 5 to 10. However, because we try to make the sport as inclusive for all visual impairments, we do allow our national tournament and regional tournaments and all local clubs and development camps to make that kind of wiggle room a little bit deeper as so Graham touched on that he's a before. So Graham would have a little bit more vision than 10%.

However, he's still legally blind. So when it comes to our national tournament, as I said, we never want to turn anybody away. So a lot of our players are members of the CNIB. And as long as they're legally blind within our community, we welcome to try the sport and taking part in all our events.

L

Lis Malone 28:03

When you do your percentage of blindness for your ratings, is that based on field division percentage?

L

Luca DeMontis 28:10

Yes.

S

Steve Barclay 28:14

Well, that was awkward silence. Space waiting for a follow up from

L

Luca DeMontis 28:31

I was expecting another question.

R

Ryan Fleury 28:33

We've got more.

R

Rob Mineault 28:35

This is the hockey equivalent of everybody going for the puck and crashing into each other. I don't know if there's a name for that, but that's what we just did.

S

Steve Barclay 28:47

There was a there was a scrum on the wall they had to call the whistle for it.

R

Ryan Fleury 28:54

So one of the other questions Rob and I were talking about earlier today was girls, females women, do they have their own blind Hockey League? Or are they welcome to join the existing leagues? How does that all work?

L

Luca DeMontis 29:08

Yeah, the sport is co-ed. So we do encourage women to join our league. We've actually had a huge growth in numbers in girls and women in blind hockey over the last three years, so big that last year at our national tournament, we were able to host the first ever girls and women's Blind Hockey Summit, which saw 24 girls and women take part in a two day event. So that was remarkable to see the girls got this have their own safe space their own time on the ice as a group they took part in played the first ever girls only Blind Hockey game. So the sport is growing on the female side. We've had some great partners that have helped us grow along that side. And then we've also got a great ambassador, you know, Natalie Spooner from the Canadian Olympic women's hockey team. She's great to have on board. She's a huge role model to the girls and all our programs so big that it's a lot of ride with me to actually share that. This national team, our 2022 / 2023 Canadian National Hockey Team has Amanda Provan on the team and she's the first female ever to be named to the Canadian National Blind Hockey Team. So the sport is definitely played by boys, girls, men, women, and everybody that loves the sport who is visually impaired.

G

Graham Foxcroft 30:19

In the local kind of teams, they just play with us all the time. And you know, and it's it's fun. It's getting them out there and enjoying the sport.

L

Luca DeMontis 30:34

Yeah, yeah, we've got great partners, great corporate partners, great funders, incredible donors from across this country. So we're, we're able to get on the ice. And that's, I think, the main thing that we're excited to really get to started. I know, for myself, I just recently got back from Halifax so my season's begun. Graham, he's been on the ice with the Vancouver Eclipse so. yeah, the sport is back on the ice. We've had a couple of tough years just to ensure as everybody else has, right, so we're excited to finally be able to, to get out there and continue to grow the sport.

S

Steve Barclay 31:14

So what is your typical season look like for Blind Hockey?

L

Luca DeMontis 31:20

So we host as I mentioned, we host a regional tournament this year, we're hosting a Western regional tournament that will take place November 18 to 20th. The Canadian National Team will play against the Americans on October 21 to 23rd in Fort Wayne, Indiana. And then we'll host our National Tournament March 26 and 28th in Toronto, at Maple Leaf Gardens, followed by our Summer Development Camp, which will take place in either July or August and a location to be named. So the season is it used to be a typical hockey season from September to April. But now, I believe there is no offseason anymore. So I'm not complaining. But yeah, we've got events that go throughout the year if it's smaller events, such as an Alberta challenge, where

three teams from Alberta will take part in a little Blind Hockey demonstration over a weekend. Or if it's something that just recently happened with some members from the Toronto ice. I was traveling to Montreal to partake in a Blind Hockey weekend. We've got great volunteers on the club level such as Graham, you look at some names like Francoise Beauregard, and names from across the community that are all friends. So they love the game, to play, and they want to keep playing it. So they've now gone and set up some of their own little demonstrations and exhibitions.

R

Ryan Fleury 32:45

Graham, I'm gonna ask you this question because, you know, Vancouver is so spread out Surrey White Rock, Cloverdale, Richmond and so on. How do you guys deal with transportation? You know, somebody, let's say out in Richmond wants to come out to Surrey and try the game out. You know, maybe they have their own equipment, you know, are they packing 30, 40 pound hockey bags on transit and hiking up to Surrey?

G

Graham Foxcroft 33:14

Unfortunately, yes. I would love to find a bus driver that would be go around, pick everyone up and take us but unfortunately transit is the way it is. But we'll meet people. Like if you need to be met somewhere, we can meet you somewhere. As long as you get on a transit system, we'll meet people at Scott Road where we play. We're right at the sky train station. We just moved there last year for that purpose because they wanted to make it accessible for people to get out and do it. So we're right off the Sky Train, we're like a block away from the station. We'll meet you there. We'll meet you anywhere along the line if need be right, we've got players coming in from North Van, we've got a fellow coming in from Abbotsford. So he's gets in there fairly early to come in from Abbotsford, players from New West. We did have a player from Steveston area out in Richmond that did come and play. But he's moved up to Campbell River. So it's a little far for him to come now.

S

Steve Barclay 34:09

Yeah, it's a bit of a commute.

R

Ryan Fleury 34:10

Well, it must be pretty challenging. Because you know, there may be people that want to be involved or get involved but you know, they're just, it's so hard to get to. It's such a long way to travel. It is you know, Canada.

G

Graham Foxcroft 34:23

Yeah, we'll help you out if we can, right so we'd really like to go across the province really and kind of show people what we do and maybe get some people involved around the province but like you said it's so far spread out. It's challenging for sure.

R

Ryan Fleury 34:42

Is Vancouver, the only Blind Hockey Team in BC? Like has Kamloops have a program or Prince George or anywhere else?

G

Graham Foxcroft 34:50

No, just Vancouver. We do have some kids in Kelowna that came down for a youth trial that we did last year which we're looking to book ice for for this year as well. And we have some kids in Nanaimo and Campbell River as well that came out and played with us in a couple of tournaments and stuff like that. But they can't come regularly because it's just too expensive to take the ferry and things for them as well. And other commitments in life happen. Some went to school and went to college versus playing hockey, you know? Yeah, that's what they want to do.

R

Ryan Fleury 35:23

And how many teams are there in Canada? Luca?

L

Luca DeMontis 35:26

Right, now we got 14 programs.

R

Ryan Fleury 35:28

Nice.

L

Luca DeMontis 35:31

The number's growing. 10 years ago, we had four. So the numbers are definitely growing. And it's good to see. And, you know, as Graham just touched on there, there there is other communities that potentially could start a program or a team in the coming years, right. I don't see why not, especially with our help and assistance. I think it's possible. So it's exciting. It's an exciting time, we do have grow goals to grow the sport, not only in, in this country, but we've got goals to help grow the sport around the world. We've, I've had the privilege to travel to Finland and help them put on their first ever development, Blind Hockey camp, right. And now they're just hosting another one coming up over the holidays in December. And we had a call with them last week. And they said that they're good to go to host and bring up to 10 Blind hockey players to our upcoming tournament in March in Toronto. So the sport is definitely growing around the world, even in England. And that's one of our goals with Canadian hockey is not only do like I mentioned, we want to grow here, but we want to help grow it around the world, because that's what a world leader in the sport would do. And that's what we believe we should do, as leaders is provide the resources if it's a template, and, and how to create or how

to begin to host a program or an event, any way that we could help out, we're always looking to grow the sport by helping other countries. And it was, it was a remarkable to go out there to Finland and see some of these individuals get on the ice not only for the very first time, but to see them be part of a team for the very first time and to hear them talk about a sport in a different language, but to see their smiling faces, like it really lets you know that you're doing something that is respected and is somebody that they want to partake in.

R

Ryan Fleury 37:24

I find that kind of hard to believe, you know, we've got powerhouses like Finland, Sweden, the Czechs have been, you know, such such strongholds in mainstream hockey. And yet, they're still kind of at that grassroots level. It's amazing to me.

L

Luca DeMontis 37:39

And it takes time, right? Like nothing was built overnight. If you look at even other pair sports, like Sledge Hockey. Sledge Hockey took a long time to get accepted by other countries to then be accepted into the Paralympics. And now we look at Women's Sledge and the dominant force that they're growing in, in the industry, right. And I think it's important that with dedication, and passion, a lot of good things could happen in the future, right and for the sport. And I think it's important, because it's not for the individuals who are playing it right now. It's for the individuals that haven't even been introduced to the sport yet, that will, it will do so much for them. It will help them with so much off the ice in life. And, and I'm a big believer, as I mentioned earlier, our players are ambassadors, but they're also role models in their own communities. And they've got amazing stories to share. And I think those stories make them well respected individuals within a community, we've got players that have great jobs, right. And I think something like that it's so important for a child who's visually impaired to look up to to have these role models that it doesn't matter if they scored three goals in a Blind Hockey game, or if they're a judge in their Provincial Court system. These are individuals who are role models on and off the ice.

R

Rob Mineault 38:52

Yeah, actually, I want to sort of spin off of that and ask you a little bit about the youth programs and sort of how important they are as well, because it does seem to me that there is a real potential for role models and sort of building all kinds of skills in a youth that may be visually impaired. Things like working with a team or building confidence. There seems to be so many implications that could really sort of spill out from like outside of the ice. So can you describe what the youth programs are like for Canadian Blind Hockey?

L

Luca DeMontis 39:38

Yeah, I think they're probably our most important program. And it's not to discredit any of other programs. It's just so important to get these children and youth on the ice, to play, to learn to skate, to learn to do something active. As we look right now, it's easier to stay home and do

nothing than it is to get out and do something active and that's One thing we thoroughly thoroughly stress to all our youth participants, I love getting on the ice with the children and youth, it brings me back to why I fell in love with the game, to pass the puck around and to see the smile on their face. And when they scored their first goal, or when they maybe receive their first body check or give their first body check. Of course, it was all accidental. You see that smile on their face, and it makes them feel like they're a hockey player. And I think that is so important, because at that moment, they aren't letting their disability be a disability, they're letting their disability be the ability to be able to partake in this program of blind hockey. So our youth programs are so important to the organization. They give us a room to grow. But more importantly, they give us the reason why we founded the organization of Canadian Blind Hockey, its original mandate to get children and youth on the ice who are blind and partially sighted. So that's one thing that I thoroughly hold very close to myself. And my role is getting as many children and youth as we can get on the ice from across this country. We've taught over 1000 children and youth from this country, how to skate and play the game of blind hockey all through our incredible program where we have partnered with school boards across the country. So many school boards we've got great relationships with, and we host a field trip day where the school board brings all the blind and partially sighted students from that school board, we come to an arena for a day, we get on the ice, we learn to skate, we pass around the blind hockey puck. And we have a fun time, as Graham mentioned, fun, fun, fun is really what stressed. And you know what pizza, everybody loves the pizza part of lunch. So we get that and we invite our partners to share a little bit about what they do. And really what it really is, is it's a time for these children and youth to be around other individuals who are the same age as them who are going through the same challenges in life right now that they're going through. Because for many of them, they sit in a classroom alone in their school, because they're the only child or youth with a visual impairment. So they're not really engaging with other children in conversation and all that. So I love when you when you get them all together in a change room that starts quiet, early, around 945. And then by the time that pizza walks in the door, it's hard to get everyone attention to let them know that there's the cheese pizza and the pepperoni pizza that arrived, because it's just so remarkable to see how quick the camaraderie is built. And in many cities with school boards, we host this yearly. So you see these relationships that have developed within the program continue to grow, and they grow to become Facebook friends, and then they grow that they see each other, not only at the next hockey event, but now they've talked to each other and they want to attend the next summer camp. Right? So there's a lot of room for growth, but it all starts at our children and youth blind hockey programs. They are the future. They are the reason that we do what we do. Because if it wasn't for them, there really wouldn't be a need to grow the sport as much as we are trying to grow it.

R

Rob Mineault 43:03

So in terms of training, and and sort of teaching that sport, especially to youth, is there is sort of the coaching method has that been adapted as well? You know, when you're teaching, say a visually impaired youth how to skate, does that look a lot differently than, say teaching anybody to skate? And and sort of who does that? Are there other specific coaches and stuff that, that take this on volunteers or other, you know, blind, you know, sort of veteran hockey players?

L

Luca DeMontis 43:36

I'll go with D, all of the above. Yeah. We got great volunteers that have played the game at a very high level if it's the collegiate in the NCAA, if it's pro in Europe, if it's an even in the AHL here. So volunteers are huge, but skating is skating. So we try to teach it to the children in youth. Same way, it was taught to me just by getting out there and letting them know that it's okay if they fall, because you're going to fall. But what's more important is how quick Are you going to get up? Right? So a lot of the kids and in fact, every kid has all the equipment when they're learning to skate for the first time. So if they do fall, it's a good chance not going to hurt because they got on all the protective gear, right? So we really emphasize that is the first step is getting out there. You're already winning one nothing, right? So we always really let them see the positive side of everything. But that's actually a great question, because I'm very honored to let everybody on this podcast know that Canadian Blind Hockey is taking another step forward. And we are creating a coaching resource manual. And this coaching resource manual will be also a video manual, and also a copy manual. And what that will do is it will help us create new coaches in communities not only across our country, but this goes back to creating resources that can help other countries around the world. So we are excited to be creating that and filming that and we're hoping to launch that round our national tournament in March.

R

Rob Mineault 45:00

Yeah, that's amazing, because I really do see, part of the part of the issue, and especially with Canada, is that, you know, we are so spread out. And so there's a lot of really small communities that you might have one or two visually impaired kids, and that's it. That's, that's all that they're in their town. And so for something like that, you know, where you could actually have, you know, a volunteer or a coach in a small town, that could actually be coaching a couple of the kids, even though they, you know, they can't obviously can't form a team or anything, but they can still gain all those skills. And who knows, you know, maybe, you know, they get older and they move to a bigger city where they could actually join a Blind Hockey team. So I think that that's, that's actually a really important component of of this whole thing, and something that I think that there's going to be a lot of value for.

L

Luca DeMontis 45:52

That's, that's extremely true. And what's really cool that we're starting to see now is kids that are kind of, at that age, where they're looking to see what college or university they're gonna go to, they're actually looking to see what city has a blood hockey team that they can play for and go to school at. So that's pretty cool to actually see that from our organization standpoint. And I love it because it shows their dedication, right. So it's cool to see and and I think it speaks volumes on how they want to continue to play the sport as much as possible. In some of those cities and towns, where there might only be one or two visually impaired children or youth, we do encourage those children or youth, if they're able to if they do have enough vision and if it's safe enough to play on their local minor hockey organization. We've got an individual in Peterborough that is legally blind, but he plays with the Peterborough Junior Petes with his friends who he goes to school with, and they know about his visual condition. They know that he's legally blind, but he's still got the skill. And it's still safe, where he's able to participate with these players. So we encourage that main thing we encourage is being active taking part in team sports, right. And for us, it's sports, but it could be anything, it could be music, it could be art, it could be just something so little that if you're passionate about it, we're really trying to

emphasize and push is follow your passion. Don't let anybody stop you right? Go out there. And if you believe that you want to learn how to skate or you want to try the sport, a blind hockey, then we believe you can do it. And we're going to provide you with all the proper resources and a safe outlet to try it right and to partake in the sport. Because I think not only is hockey for everyone, but I think it's a sport that helped me so much in my life grow to the individual that I am today. And I see how much it's doing for the individuals and adults, children youth who are part of our programs already. So could you Is there anything going on in the next little bit? What do you guys up to right now? So yeah, there's everything's going on right now. Programs are on the ice across the country. Definitely get out there visit Graham and his and his teammates. Get out there to check out the clips right there. They're a great team. They've got a lot of incredible players, as I touched on so many times now with amazing stories. But yeah, that's probably definitely the closest team to to everybody here. I would encourage checking that out checking us out on social media, we've got a couple of events that we're planning, Calgary November 18 to 20th. That's going to be super exciting, National Blind Hockey tournament in Toronto in March, those would be the two biggest events in Canadian soil that we're planning. Definitely follow us on our website, canadianblindhockey.com. That's how you can keep up to date with all the news information, games. Old archive footage is all on our YouTube channel, as I mentioned, and the sport not only is it growing here in Canada, but it's growing around the world. So we try to share as much positive news from other countries who are starting blind hockey programs as possible.

R

Rob Mineault 48:54

Now, are you guys not going down to the States? Is there a game that's that's going on in the near future to in down in Fort Wayne?

L

Luca DeMontis 49:09

Yes. So Team Canada will play Team USA in Fort Wayne, Indiana, October 21 to 23rd in a best of three blind hockey series. So this will be the third time Canada's played USA. Canada 2 and 0. And this, we're looking to make it 3 and 0, of course, here on the Canadian side, but you know, they've got it. They've got a good team. Both teams got some new players on it. So it's going to be some good fast paced, exciting Blind Hockey and I'm excited to get out there. We'll be leaving from Canada, Toronto next week. On Wednesday, head out there we'll have a practice. And then we'll have a couple of team meetings and then the puck will drop on competition, so it's exciting time here. The players are all in their local hometowns on the National Team and they're just training. They're on the ice with their local club. There is a member from the Vancouver Eclipse that is on the Canadian national team, Sean Heaslip. We've also got one of their coaches, our goalie coach Joey Lee. So there's representation from, I'd say pretty much all the clubs. But there's a there's a good amount of players.

G

Graham Foxcroft 50:20

Every province has got a representative I'd say. Except for the middle ones, because there's no programs in the middle.

R Rob Mineault 50:29

Well, there you go. Maybe Lis wants to put some money. We'll talk afterwards.

L Luca DeMontis 50:35

Yeah, definitely. Not a friendly wager there on the line between you two.

L Lis Malone 50:42

There will most likely be some alcohol involved.

L Luca DeMontis 50:45

You can't go wrong with a case of Canadian beer for a case of American beer. Right.

L Lis Malone 50:49

That's that's kind of how we roll you know.

R Rob Mineault 50:52

Interesting. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Listen, you you may be taking a trip down the Frugal McDoogal.

R Ryan Fleury 51:02

Still waiting for my T shirt.

R Rob Mineault 51:03

That's right. Listen, guys. We want to thank you so much for coming on. We're excited about the 21st. Honestly, you is there if people are interested actually in in actually watching that tournament where is the best place to go in order to sort of watch that?

L Luca DeMontis 51:22

So yeah, the tournament will be broadcasted. The host of the tournament is currently finalizing all broadcasts details, but as I mentioned, follow us on our Twitter handles, canadianblindhockey.com, and we will have the broadcast link on there leading up to the tournament once everything is finalized. And if you're watching from home, definitely tweet us a screenshot. Celebrate with us after a goal and we'd love to interact with all our fans across this country.

R Rob Mineault 51:53

Cool. All right. Well, we will definitely do that. Good. Best of luck to you go kick some butt so I can get some beer from Lis.

S Steve Barclay 52:03

I'll send you some Molson.

R Rob Mineault 52:05

No, no. We'll talk later. Later. Not Coors either. Listen, listen, guys. Thanks again for coming on. And best of luck, and we'll have to we'll love to have you guys on again.

L Luca DeMontis 52:25

Sounds good. Thank you for all your help promoting more awareness and letting us share how much we love the sport of Blind Hockey.

R Rob Mineault 52:32

Absolutely. Okay, guys.

L Luca DeMontis 52:34

Thanks. Bye. Bye.

R Rob Mineault 52:38

Go sports. See, yeah, that was pretty good. See I didn't completely embarrass you guys.

S Steve Barclay 52:47

Hockey's for everybody except you, Rob.

R Rob Mineault 52:50

Clearly, now listen, I got I got all the terminology. I got slapshot. Were you guys impressed with the slapshot reference?

S Steve Barclay 52:57

Oh, absolutely. Yes. Yeah. Totally impressed. Yeah,

L Lis Malone 53:00

I never never heard that one before.

R Rob Mineault 53:03

Okay, well, hey, listen, and check this out. Everybody watch what I do here. And but I have to warn you guys. That was probably a one timer. Oh. Okay. I thought you'd be more impressed. Whatever. I may have been made. I may have played some video game hockey. That's all I'm saying. So I know some of the stuff. Well, what so I don't know, what do you guys think?

S Steve Barclay 53:33

Well, they haven't convinced me to do stuff with frozen water.

R Rob Mineault 53:38

I can't I you know, I remember learning how to skate in which I have to admit, I never really finished out of that, like, my, the way that I stop is hitting something that I need to I don't know how to stop on a skate. But I can't like I the idea of of learning that while you're visually impaired. Like that's, that's really intimidating to me.

R Ryan Fleury 54:04

I would have to say, again, this is just my own opinion. But coming from the sighted world to losing all of my sight. Anything you do the first time is a little little terrifying. You know, the first time you grab your white cane and go for a walk down the street, even though you've had some own am training, you're doing this on your own and you're walking down the street and it it's a little unnerving.

R Rob Mineault 54:32

Yeah, it just I guess when you know, again, I guess I have sort of a, a bias. I think I have a little bit of a bias because I never really learned to skate properly. So I, whenever I put on a pair of skates, I feel instantly like out of control. So I'm sure it's very different when you're when you're learning, but even then, like, I think I feel like skating you are. I don't know, we'd like you. It's, it's different than navigating. You know, when you're not on the ice, like, it's just different, like you're going faster? I don't know. But but you may be right, Ryan, maybe it just is it's just a matter of perspective and just learning.

R

Ryan Fleury 55:45

Yeah, one thing that didn't touch on is, a lot of times the defenseman will stay in their zones and have constant communication with the goalie. They're not skating up the ice, with the puck to try and score on the opposite end, they have their spot, they have their space. And like I said, they're in constant communication with the goalie. So they're oriented to where they are in that spatial arena, right. So there is that too, you have your stick, so you can feel the board's you know you're chatting with your your teammates, so you can still get turned around and stuff, of course, because there's no point of reference, right, you're out in the open, I think.

L

Lis Malone 56:24

You would get very turned around, I think it would be so easy to lose your orientation or where you are on the ice. Especially if you're young because of the the movement of the drifting aspect and the turning, you're constantly turning when you're going after the puck and maneuvering the puck, regardless of its regulation puck or the the audible one. But um, yeah, that to me, that seems like that would be so hard. So I think it's it's a it's an amazing skill set that these players have developed.

R

Rob Mineault 56:58

Well, and I wondered about that, too. And I kind of I almost wanted to ask a little bit about strategy and coaching strategy, but I thought that, you know, maybe that's not something that that you know, they really want to necessarily talk about.

L

Lis Malone 57:09

You're going to have to get the manual. There you go. There you go. Coach, Rob,

R

Rob Mineault 57:15

Well, hey, listen, maybe. But uh, but I wonder if there are like different techniques or the way that sound behaves, say in our in a rink, where you can't you are able to maybe orientate yourself just based on sound or who knows, I mean, there could be a whole a whole list of things that have strategies that players can use in order to do that very thing like orient themselves or know exactly where they are. And especially if you're they're communicating with their with their teammates, and they know that whatever Bob is there, and they can hear Bob and they can orient themselves that way. It's a whole fascinating conversation that you know what he spins off of the conversation that we had today. But yeah, that might be interesting to do in the future, talk a little bit about strategy.

L

Lis Malone 58:08

I probably know the answer to this. But Rob, have you ever been to a live hockey game or an NHL game?

 Rob Mineault 58:14

Are you gonna be surprised? I actually have, yes.

 Lis Malone 58:19

Okay. So what I think twice, twice okay. So then you you would you can relate to there is that there is an etiquette when you go to a hockey game, you know, we're for example, like you stay seated, while the while the puck is in play, you know, go to your seat. So you know, and the, I guess the configuration of the hockey rink, with the protective glass and everything, it carries this beautiful acoustic throughout the the arena. So you can hear the puck, you can hear the checks, you can hear almost all of those elements of the game so I can only imagine that probably when you are actually on the ice and you have that little bit of a sound bubble or a sound barrier with the with the glass that probably insulates. I'm willing to bet that there's probably so much more that the players are able to hear and being able to talk to each other and really communicate with one another.

 Rob Mineault 59:25

Yeah, I would agree with that. Wait, you aren't you're not supposed to get up from your seat while the pucks in play? That's a thing?

 Lis Malone 59:32

Yeah. Yeah, that's a thing.

 Rob Mineault 59:35

I totally got up from my seat and got my \$7 beer.

 Steve Barclay 59:39

You're also not supposed to walk back to your seat well the play's happening.

 Lis Malone 59:42

You're supposed to wait

 Rob Mineauit 59:43

Yeah, well they don't when he signs up. How am I supposed to know that?

 Lis Malone 59:47

Proper etiquette. That's fan etiquette.

 Rob Mineault 59:53

Sorry, sorry, Vancouver Canucks. Maybe that's why you lost that night.

 Steve Barclay 59:59

Yeah, You probably cut off their sight lines across the ice. We'll take any excuse we can get in Vancouver.

 Lis Malone 1:00:11

Rob's fault.

 Rob Mineault 1:00:12

That's ready. Revenge is sweet.

 Lis Malone 1:00:17

Revenge is a dish.

 Rob Mineault 1:00:24

That's right. It's best served cold. And face washes in the snow are very cold.

 Lis Malone 1:00:36

Rob's hangry.

 Rob Mineault 1:00:37

Let's get out of here.

L

Lis Malone 1:00:40

Well, all that talk of pizza parties, right?

R

Rob Mineault 1:00:44

All right, let's get out of here. Hey, Lis.

L

Lis Malone 1:00:46

Hey, Rob.

R

Rob Mineault 1:01:14

Where can people find us?

L

Lis Malone 1:01:16

We can be found on the web at www.atbanter.com

R

Rob Mineault 1:01:21

You know what else I was wondering? Do you think you need a license to drive a Zamboni? Like is that a special skill set? Like do you have to go to training or something do you have to Zamboni school?

L

Lis Malone 1:01:36

Zamboni school?

S

Steve Barclay 1:01:38

Probably I expect there probably is because you don't want people just driving one of those into the boards.

R

Rob Mineault 1:01:44

Yeah, that's a really good point. Yeah.

L

Lis Malone 1:01:47

L

LIS MAIONE 1:01:47

So do you get Zamboni insurance?

R

Rob Mineault 1:01:50

May? Yeah, maybe. I mean, I wonder if that's ever happened. Somebody's had a few and then when did the ice and ran into the boards. aren't even order Zamboni does like what does it do?

S

Steve Barclay 1:02:06

It smooths out the ice.

R

Rob Mineault 1:02:08

What is it spraying water, like what's it doing under there?

S

Steve Barclay 1:02:13

Yeah, I think it actually heats the ice a little bit and then it melted and smooth it yeah just not pretty sure that's what it does. It may lay down water on top of it as well. Additional water I'm not sure. Freezes right up. Yeah. All right. There you go. Zamboni driver charged with impaired driving.

R

Rob Mineault 1:02:33

Wait, really? Did you just look that up?

S

Steve Barclay 1:02:35

After damaging a rink police say yeah, yeah. Oh wow. From back in 2015 December 21 2015. Charged with impaired driving and resisting arrest after allegedly crashing into the boards of an ice rink between periods of a hockey game according to police. This was the second intermission of a game involving the Seine River snipers Bantam team in Manitoba.

L

Lis Malone 1:03:10

Wow, you really do need Zamboni insurance,

R

Rob Mineault 1:03:14

I guess. I guess so. Wow. That's funny. I want to hear that. 911 call. s There you go. So I wonder what happens if you get run over by a Zamboni?

S

Steve Barclay 1:03:44

You get put on ice.

R

Rob Mineault 1:03:45

Oh, there you go. That's what I was waiting for. Okay, anyways, where was I? They can also drop us an email if they so desire at cowlbell@atbanter.com.

L

Lis Malone 1:04:00

And people do not stand up during a game. Please. Do better than Rob.

S

Steve Barclay 1:04:07

Yeah, except when Vancouver scores. Yeah. But hey, you know what else? What? People can find us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

R

Ryan Fleury 1:04:19

Excellent. But not on the ice. But not on the ice

R

Rob Mineault 1:04:27

All right that is gonna do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course to Luca and Graham for joining us and we will see everybody next week.