

# Let's talk about

# POWERCHAIR SOCCER

Hi, I'm Jaxon and I'm 13 years old.

My mum and I had the idea years ago of starting a junior side for powerchair soccer to try and get me to join a team sport. We approached NSW Powerchair Football Association, and thankfully they were keen to get a junior soccer side started too!

I still remember my first time trying out the sport in 2015. We had only just started, and the turnout was quite underwhelming. Only three others showed up, who were all friends of mine from school. We felt a bit overwhelmed by watching the older players play and could tell that we had a long way to grow in the sport.

The older players had proper sports wheelchairs, with metal soccer guards that are used in competitive matches. Because we were all new, we didn't have that privilege yet. We used our everyday wheelchairs, but were lucky enough that a parent had made fibreglass guards that could be easily strapped onto our wheelchairs.

Once I was able to hit the large soccer ball with the guard attached by controlling my electric wheelchair myself, the intimidating feeling diminished and the excitement of the sport set in. In no time I was buzzing around, whacking the ball in all directions, and I knew I definitely was going to love this sport.

Over the next year, we started to promote powerchair soccer through many outlets. Posters were given to Northcott, Muscular Dystrophy NSW, Westmead Children's Hospital, schools and many more places. The sport was growing slowly, and we finally had enough people to play two teams against each other.

A few more seasons went by, and that was when the sport finally started to grow into something special that the disabled community could participate in. A wonderful mum of one of my fellow teammates approached Holden, who were kind enough to grant the Holden Home Ground Advantage Sports Grant to the NSW Powerchair Football Association. It supplied us with eight sports wheelchairs for the juniors.

Finally the younger players could play in the professional sport wheelchairs too! Suddenly, more kids slowly started showing up, and the sport was becoming something much more exciting.

Around that time, an older player and his brother volunteered to take the junior development squad under their wing and devote some time to helping us further develop our skills. We started the 2018 season with over 20 players, some playing weekly and some playing monthly.

We eventually moved from Kevin Betts Stadium in Mount Druitt to Valentine Sports Park in Glenwood. Our brilliant coaches created a training regime specifically tailored for the younger players, most of whom were now playing in professional sports wheelchairs every week.



Other older players came on board to help guide and train the development team too, and it was amazing to see the growth of everyone's game. All the younger players felt so grateful for this opportunity and for the time that was being volunteered to help the juniors grow. This made me love the game even more.

Over the years, an annual Football4All event is held to promote powerchair soccer to others in wheelchairs. On this day medals are given out to the players to acknowledge their growth and achievement throughout the season.

We love seeing new players turn up to try out! In 2018 our juniors also had the opportunity to head down to Canberra to play against their local development squad. We stayed at the

Australian Institute of Sport where we trained and played games for three days. It was an absolutely amazing weekend that was brilliant for team connection. An added bonus was that our development team won the final game for NSW.

So this is the story of how the junior development squad for wheelchair soccer has evolved over the last few years. I would encourage other kids to try it out, as it is a fun, fast-paced game that gets you out of the house. Before I started, I didn't do many extracurricular activities other than drama. Now we all meet weekly during the season and we have developed so many amazing friendships and connections that I know will last forever.

Being part of a team is like being part of a little community. We get so excited every time a new player joins, and I'm so close now with my teammates after playing alongside them for a few years.

Another reason why powerchair soccer is so incredible is the support that you get from, and give to, each other. We all have struggles, and we lean on each other's backs when we need additional support. These things are what we all need and they are appreciated so much when we find we are struggling with something.

These are just some of the reasons as to why I encourage you to come check out powerchair soccer!

For more information contact Lija on **0425 310 600** or email [lta89302@bigpond.net.au](mailto:lta89302@bigpond.net.au)

**Don't forget** - you may be eligible for a \$100 Active Kids voucher, which can be obtained through your MyServiceNSW account.