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TOP STORY

New adaptive sports program coming to WKU

By JOHN REECER jreecec@bgdailynews.com
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Bowling Green Parks & Recreation and WKU Campus Recreation and Wellness are partnering to roll out the university program for students of all abilities at the Preston Center and at the WKU Intramural Complex on Sunday, Oct. 24, 2021 of the Parks & Rec. Department's Adaptive Sports Program for special populations in the community. The new sports center has several wheelchairs built for basketball and tennis and other equipment for goal ball and baseball. (Grace Ramey/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Grace Ramey

There are fewer than 30 collegiate adaptive sports programs in the country, but Western Kentucky University will join that group this fall.

Thanks to a partnership between the Bowling Green Parks & Recreation Department and WKU Campus Recreation and Wellness, the university will roll out its first sports program for students of all abilities Oct. 24.



Events through the new sports club will take place at the Preston Center and the WKU Intramural Complex. While the number of sports being offered is still being planned, club president Maddie Duncan said basketball, baseball and tennis will be in the mix.



The program came to fruition thanks to Duncan and city parks department special populations instructor Cameron Levis.

Levis, who has helped lead the city parks department’s adaptive sports program, said WKU’s club will be an extension of the parks department’s work with special populations in the community.



“We are excited to make an announcement on something we have been working a couple of years on. With our current adaptive sports program, we serve youth and adults. So, this is that middle ground to try and serve individuals that want to participate in adaptive sports who are between high school and the end of their college careers.”

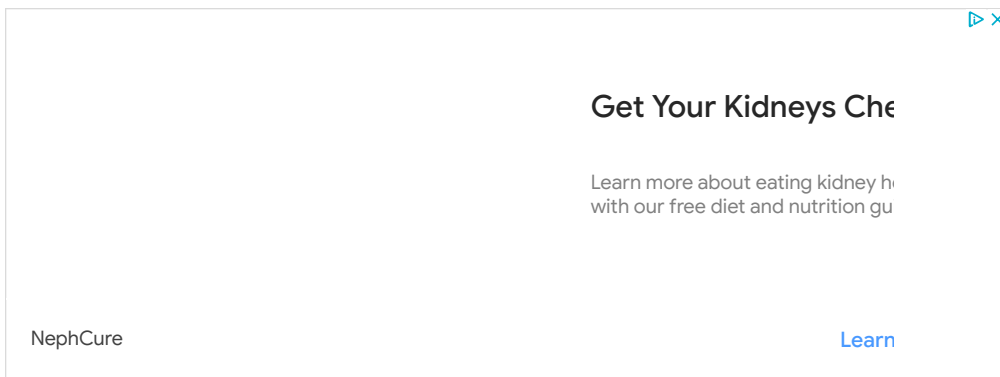
Levis and Duncan worked to make the program an official sports club at WKU, kicking off this semester.

“There is a lot of implications for what this means for people with disabilities in higher education,” Levis said. “ ... For us to start something like this is a huge opportunity. It will be the first of its kind in the state of Kentucky.”

He also said the program will be an important tool for recruiting students of all abilities to WKU. Levis highlighted a study from the University of Michigan that estimates more than 62,000 individuals under age 18 in the U.S. were involved with adaptive sports.

With there being fewer than 30 collegiate adaptive sports programs in the country, Levis said this is an opportunity for WKU.

“We are excited to add another program this fall, and hopefully one of those people looking for an adaptive sports will come to a great university that is WKU,” he said. “This will give a reason for individuals to come to this school. The impact of this program will go far beyond anything either of us can imagine for years to come.”



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Duncan acted as the main liaison and point person between the parks department, where she is finishing up her internship, and WKU, where she is a student.

She said the idea came out of her love for working with the community through the parks department’s adaptive sports events.

“I think it is a really important program because it will open up a whole new section of people who may not be able to get off campus,” Duncan said. “This will bridge to gap for them, and open up a whole new population we can hit. I’m looking forward to introducing it to a new group of people who haven’t seen it.”

The new sports club currently has several wheelchairs built for basketball and equipment for goal ball and baseball. She also recently wrote a grant with the U.S. Tennis Association to secure funding for additional tennis equipment.

On Oct. 24, organizers will showcase the sports being offered to students this semester. The event will be at the Preston Center.

While Duncan is set to graduate in December, it’s her goal to make sure the program gets off the ground and has a strong start.

“I think everybody is really excited to get a program like this on campus,” she said.

To start a sports club at WKU, an adviser who works full-time on campus must endorse and watch over the club. That's where Matt Davis, assistant director of the Student Accessibility Resource Center, comes into the picture.

Davis grew up in Bowling Green with a condition called spina bifida, which causes him to regularly use a wheelchair.

He said he formerly had to go as far as Nashville to get involved with adaptive sports, but now the new sports club and parks department programs have localized accessible activities.

"It's really exciting to see these programs come together," Davis said. "If you are physically active, it helps you mentally as well. That's big for those that are disabled. We just want students to get involved in these programs. You don't have to have a disability to get involved."

Davis said anyone interested in the program can contact him at matt.davis@wku.edu or Levis at 270-393-3265. Additional information can be found by contacting Campus Recreation and Wellness.

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