

# Beyond sight, rebounding with sound: Blind hockey *transcript*

## [Opening sounds of a hockey game]

### **Amanda McGee (narrator)**

These are the kinds of sounds you'd hear in any hockey game in rinks across Canada. But this game is different.

## [Sound of puck with metal ball bearings]

### **Amanda McGee (narrator)**

This is blind hockey, the fastest sport played by athletes with 10% vision or less.

## [Sound of a blind hockey game]

### **Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Blind hockey isn't new. The sport originated in 1936 at the W Ross MacDonald School for the Blind in Brantford, Ontario. The Toronto Ice Owls blind hockey team was later founded in 1972.

### **Joe Fornasier**

My name is Joe Fornasier, I'm 20 years old. I started playing hockey when I was three years old when I had 20/20 vision. Fell in love with the game back then on my backyard rink, started playing rep hockey and at a rep hockey tryout when I was 10 years old, I started missing passes, not being able to see other players that well and within the next two months, I had lost 96% of my vision due to a genetic disease. I quit hockey at that point, just hated the game. I didn't want anything to do with it. Because I was just mad at it, mad at the world that this happened to me and it got taken away from me. And my dad ended up forcing me to go to this try blind hockey session when I was 14 years old. But right when I stepped back out on the ice and I was able to actually play and hear the puck and use my ears as my eyes, I fell right back in love with the game.

### **Amanda McGee (narrator)**

At just 14 years old, Joe was granted exceptional status to play with the Toronto Ice Owls.

## [Sounds of a blind hockey game]

### **Wayne St. Denis**

Hi, my name is Wayne St. Denis. I'm the manager and player for the Toronto Ice Owls blind hockey team. I've been playing with the Toronto Ice Owls since 1997. So that's 26 years and 10 years ago, I took the role of manager.

### **Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Wayne has managed the team since 2014.

**Wayne St. Denis**

We have adaptive rules to our game. One of the major one is the puck. The puck is three times bigger than an older puck. It's made out of metal, it has six round bearings in it.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Pucks filled with ball bearings create a distinct sound, allowing players to track its movement by listening.

**[Sound of blind hockey puck being shaken]**

**Wayne St. Denis**

Players with lower vision, they can see the puck coming. And other players you can hear it as players are fighting for the puck and passing the puck. Doesn't have a constant beep, but has enough noise that when it's in play, you can hear it.

**[Sounds of a blind hockey game]**

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Blind hockey uses three-foot-nets instead of the four-foot-nets used in sighted hockey.

**Wayne St. Denis**

And the reason for that is our goalies are totally blind. So it helps them keep in the game and it's fair to them, so it makes it a more competitive game so it's not always lopsided.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

According to the Canadian Blind Hockey rules, goalies who are not completely blind have to wear blindfolds during a game.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

In this sport, athletes with visual impairments undergo a classification system categorized as B1 players with no vision, B2 players with 5% vision or less, or B3 players with 10% vision or less. Each player is assigned a point value corresponding to their classification. Three points for B3, two points for B2 and one point for B1. Teams are constrained to a maximum value of 14 points on the ice at any given time.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Hockey is a team sport, but blind hockey takes it to the next level. One of the most significant adaptations to the rules of sighted hockey is the past rule. A team must complete at least one pass after they cross the offensive blue line before they're eligible to score.

**[Sound of the whistle call for the one pass rule]**

**Wayne St. Denis**

When creating the rules, we decided to have the one pass whistle so teamwork is more involved again. Otherwise people would probably skate up and down the ice and maybe would never pass. So it's a very important role in the sport to keep it inclusive to all players.

**Roland Arndt**

My name is Roland Arndt and I've been playing with the Ice Owls since 2007. I am 61 years old.

**Roland Arndt**

In terms of the one pass rule, it really slows the game down so that you know, it's not just a breakaway and then you score, that type of thing, right? It kind of slows the game down, lets everybody else catch up to the game. That way everybody's more involved in the scoring, it's not just a one person show.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

The Toronto Ice Owls is made up of players with a wide variety of skills. Some of these players have been selected to play on the Canadian National Blind Hockey Team. The Canadian National Blind Hockey Team is made up of elite blind hockey players from across Canada. Every year 20 players are selected nationwide to compete against Team USA at the annual International Blind Ice Hockey Series.

**[Sounds of a blind hockey game]****Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Joe was 16 years old when he first made the national team, making him the youngest player to play for Team Canada.

**Joe Fornasier**

The first goal ever scored for Team Canada was probably my most memorable moment because I was so nervous going into the game, being the youngest player ever, everyone is like 30 years old around me. I'm 16. I don't even know if I can fit in at this point. I don't know if I'll be able to play as good as I can at this high level. And my first shift of the game, my one teammate, his name is Anthony Ciulla, he kept saying, 'Joe just keep your stick on the ice all the time. Just keep your stick on the ice. I'm going to shoot the puck and always be there for the rebound.' It was kind of like in my head because I'd screwed up a couple times in practice where a rebound would come to me and my stick wasn't ready on the ice. And he comes in down the wing and takes a shot on the net and my stick is just planted right on the ice. And it almost like came off his pad hit my stick and went bar down.

**[Sound of a puck hitting the net's crossbar]****[Sounds of a crowd cheering]****Joe Fornasier**

In Ottawa, a bunch of fans there. It was just like a surreal moment like wow, I'm here made it, finally got the first goal. And that was probably this very surreal moment for me and one of my favorite moments in my blind hockey career for sure.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Players rely on their senses of sound to navigate the ice. For Nick Bullock, an Ice Owls player with less than a year of experience in the sport, the skills he's building on the ice extend beyond the rink.

**[Sounds of a blind hockey game]**

**Nick Bullick**

I would say the biggest skill that I've learned is using my other senses to be an athlete. Things like my peripheral vision, my hearing, my spatial awareness have all gone up tenfold since I've started playing blind hockey. And it's really actually helped me in day to day life to just maneuvering around in public places, things like that.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

There are blind hockey teams across Canada with the Vancouver Eclipse being one of them.

**Graham Foxcroft**

My name is Graham Foxcroft. I'm with the Vancouver Eclipse blind hockey team, and I've been playing blind hockey since probably about '95-96. I was introduced to it from a co-worker and fell in love with the game and continued on ever since.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

For Graham, blind hockey has given him the chance to play on a team, something he didn't have growing up partially sighted.

**Graham Foxcroft**

The blind hockey community has supported me because it's given me a team aspect. I've never been to a hockey tournament or anything like that or traveled with hockey. So it gave me that experience. It introduced me to so many nice and wonderful people around the community, the world, Canada itself. I've got friends from coast to coast that I can call up and say hey, how's it going? So it's a big family big community that supports one another and helps each other out.

**[Sounds of a blind hockey game]****Amanda McGee (narrator)**

In 2018, youth blind hockey programs were introduced creating a pathway for the next generation of blind hockey players.

**Aiden Quilty**

My name is Aiden Quilty and I've been with the program for roughly five years.

**Gabriel Alves**

Hi, my name is Gabriel Alves. I'm 13 years old, and I am participating in the blind hockey program.

**Cinzia Antonellis**

Hi, my name is Cinzia Antonellis. I've been playing for about six years.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

These kids are a part of the Toronto Jr. Ice Owls. The team practices at Scotiabank Pond every Sunday from October through March. For some of the players, it's not their first time playing hockey. Aidan played house league before losing his vision.

**[Sounds from a Toronto Jr. Ice Owls practice]**

**Aiden Quilty**

I was introduced to hockey beforehand. I played a lot of house league because my father also played it and still does. So I always had a passion for hockey and I always wanted to continue, even though I'm visually impaired. I just felt that it was the next step.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Aiden joined the team in the first year it started and the program has helped develop his hockey skills.

**Aiden Quilty**

I've definitely gotten a lot better at communication with my teammates on the ice, just being more vocal, tapping my stick a lot. Also, I feel like I've gotten a lot better at passing.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Blind hockey players come from all walks of life, and they share an unbreakable bond with the game and each other. Gabriel's relationships with his teammates extend into the off-season.

**[Sounds from a Toronto Jr. Ice Owls practice]**

**Gabriel Alves**

I've actually met quite a few people through blind hockey and now we go to different camps together. Over the years, I've grown attached to this program and now it's kind of like part of my life. So when I hear blind hockey, I'm like 'oh my God I do that.'

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Cinzia keeps in contact with the friends she has made through the Toronto Jr. Ice Owls.

**Cinzia Antonellis**

I see a bunch of the people here. I see them every week on a Zoom call. One of the girls who's not here today, she has the same messaging app as I do so we call each other every Saturday.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Aiden relates to his teammates and establishes bonds with them because of it.

**Aiden Quilty**

I've made a lot of friendships through it because of the similar situation, similar circumstances and just similar struggles, per se, about being visually impaired in hockey and I've met a lot of great people.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

During the weekly youth practice held for the Toronto Jr. Ice Owls, players learn how to skate and play the game.

**Cinzia Antonellis**

I've never really learned to skate before and now I know. I had to use a chair, then we've got this bar that I could hold on to and that worked, that helped a lot.

**[Sounds of Luca leading a Toronto Jr. Ice Owls practice]**

**Luca DeMontis**

My name is Luca DeMontis. I am the program manager of Canadian Blind Hockey.

**Luca DeMontis**

I've been there since the beginning. It's a program that I hold close to my heart. I've watched some of these kids grow up, spent birthdays together. It's been cool because I've been able to see the development on the ice. But I thoroughly love seeing the development off the ice, seeing them become young adults, seeing them become leaders in their community and also seeing some of them become role models now to the next wave of Jr. Ice Owls players that look up to them, right. We've also been very successful in creating the development plan, which allows these youth to develop into the adult Ice Owls program. So I think we've now been able to kind of develop and graduate six players from our Jr. Ice Owls program to the big club, the Toronto Ice Owls.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Wayne says Toronto Jr. Ice Owls players have the chance to join the adult team once they turn 16.

**Wayne St. Denis**

We get a lot of players as they get older, they come and play with us. So it's like our farm team, which is kind of cool.

**Luca DeMontis**

We really just want to ensure that every child and youth always has fun on the ice. That's the big thing. But in terms of development on the ice with the parasport a blind hockey, we're able to create almost a progression plan for each participant that we have, as some develop quicker than others. But also some have more of a visual impairment than others. So it might take them longer to learn a skill and so forth. So we really do work with every participant in making sure that they are able to develop to the best of their ability in the timeframe that we allow for throughout the program.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

During the junior Ice Owls practice, one-on-one coaching is offered to help new members learn how to play the sport.

**Luca DeMontis**

The NHL as a slogan hockey is for everyone. I thoroughly thoroughly believe we prove that, right? I think our participants with their dedication and how courageous they are to get on the ice and play a game despite living with a disability every single day of their life. I think the sport is so important because of what it does for these children, youth and adults to have the ability to feel like they are able to compete, not only the highest level, but also a level that's just introducing them to the sport, but feel like they're competing as part of a team.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Luca likes to incorporate the player suggestions during practice.

**Luca DeMontis**

I always love hearing from them, kind of what works for you, right? So a couple of minor adaptations we've made in our practices, for example, our pylons are about three feet in height, and they are the

colour black because it stands out on the ice. So that was something that the players brought to me as a suggestion. I love when the players provide suggestions, it shows they care. I think that's so important for us as an organization to let these children and youth know that their voice is not only being amplified, but it's being heard.

**Luca DeMontis**

I got involved in blind hockey through my brother. My brother ended up losing his vision and going visually impaired and is now partially sighted. He has about 4% vision left, he is a B2 classification and he's a member of the Canadian National Blind Hockey Team.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Luca's brother Mark founded courage Canada in 2009.

**Luca DeMontis**

Originally, we were called courage Canada.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

In 2016, the organization formally rebranded.

**Luca DeMontis**

We were able to rebrand and call ourselves Canadian Blind Hockey. I used to help out as a volunteer role from 2009 to 2016 and I've been on the staff of the organization ever since.

**[Sounds of Mark calling out teammates during a Toronto Ice Owls game]**

**Mark DeMontis**

My name is Mark DeMontis. I'm a member of the Toronto Ice Owls and Canada's National Blind Hockey Team. I lost my sight at 17, when I discovered blind hockey back in 2004 The rest was history. I fell in love with the game and wanted to devote the rest of my life to playing it and helping advance the sport.

**Mark DeMontis**

After I lost my sight when I was 17, I fell in love with blind hockey and then I decided when I was 22 to rollerblade across Canada. Five provinces, 5000 kilometers in 2009, an additional five provinces, 2000 kilometers in 2011 to raise funds and awareness for blind hockey programs across the country.

**Wayne St. Denis**

Blind hockey they're the, I guess you'd say, the national over lookers for blind hockey. They run the learn to skate and play hockey programs all across Canada.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Luca says the establishment of the learn to skate and try blind hockey programs in the country has helped transition blind and partially sighted youth into the sport, providing them with the opportunity to become a part of a community.

**Luca DeMontis**

Creating this program just is important for giving these children youth the ability to have a chance to get on the ice, learn to skate, play our nation's game, but really feel like they're part of a team

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Joe recognizes the importance in being part of a team.

**Joe Fornasier**

I think that's like the biggest thing because I know how difficult it was just feeling so alone as a youth being visually impaired.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Over the years, Canadian Blind Hockey has hosted numerous try blind hockey programs. These programs are available throughout Canada.

**Luca DeMontis**

We plan on average anywhere from 25 to 30 of these try blind hockey programs every season, and we've been doing it since 2011.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Try blind hockey programs are also available during the off-season. These programs invite participants of all ages.

**Slava Kotov**

My name is Slava Kotov. I've been involved with blind hockey for probably about two years. That's when I started and actually I started with the kids program here in Ontario even though I'm 40 years old.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Slava plays on the Ice Owls, along with players of different skill levels.

**Slava Kotov**

Everybody has various levels of skills, we have national team players, and we have players like myself who are just starting, you know, I could barely skate two years ago.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

To raise money for more youth programs, Joe established his charity, 'Why Not Me', in the summer, he raised over \$4,700 to help cover ice time for the Greater Toronto Area youth blind hockey program.

**Joe Fornasier**

Really, anytime I have a chance to go out there, it's, it's where it all started for me, It's where I kind of had like a restart in my life, I like to call. So being on that rink where it all started and being able to help people that were in the same position as me as bigger than winning a gold medal in my opinion.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Joe is known for being an active role model in the blind hockey community. He creates awareness of the sport by posting to his large TikTok platform and taking part in motivational speaking,

**Joe Fornasier**

Getting to be in this community with so many successful people that are visually impaired, has completely changed my outlook on what I can be. Hopefully for the younger generations, I can change their outlook on what they can be, not just as hockey players or as athletes, but as people in society that we still provide value. I felt like it was destiny, that this kind of all happened to me because I became such a great public speaker and I also went through this journey and all this adversity. That it was kind of like if this was to happen to anyone, I'm almost happy that happened to me so I can share this journey and share my story with other people and hopefully they can get inspired with it. Last year, I started to go to different schools and they liked it. So that's kind of my journey now, is to show other kids that just because you have a disability doesn't mean you're weird, doesn't mean you're not cool and that you can chase your dreams no matter what anyone else says. So it's been it's been amazing. Unreal, just seeing the feedback that I get from people saying 'I'm visually impaired, I never thought I could play hockey. Now I'm starting to play blind hockey' or someone's saying like, 'Oh, I'm just like a sighted person. I didn't think blind hockey was like a real thing, I've never heard of it before. But now that I've seen this, this is amazing where can I go watch this?' So being able to spread awareness for the game and also show other visually impaired people are other people with disabilities that there's another element for them, has been absolutely amazing.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

School boards and itinerant teachers nationwide actively promote try blind hockey programs. For Emily McLean, this is how she was introduced to the sport.

**Emily McLean**

I've been playing blind hockey since 2015. I grew up playing sighted hockey, and then I went to an event through my school board - a learn to skate thing. Hopefully they can do more of the school programs because I never heard of blind hockey before. I got invited to that. And then after that, they invited me to a youth camp and it went up from there.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

In the realm of sports, blind hockey shatters barriers, showcasing the capabilities of blind and partially sighted athletes to participate and excel.

**Emily McLean**

If you see the game in person, it's really fast and really intense so it really breaks that stigma.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Since playing the sport as a young teenager, Joe has witnessed firsthand how the sport breaks boundaries.

**Joe Fornasier**

Just showing that we are athletes, and that we train just like anyone else, and that we have dedication for the game just like anyone else. I know a lot of people think of blind hockey and think of guys as very scared and timid and not really doing a whole lot with the puck and a very slow paced game, but it's the fastest game on Earth played by the blind. It's kind of ironic, but it opens people's eyes, to what people with disabilities can do athletically. Because every single person I talked to that has watched a blind hockey game is astonished at how fast the pace is.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Mark agrees.

**Mark DeMontis**

You don't envision people have in a shot that they have or stick handling ability or the skating skills, crossovers and cutting and edging. I think it defines misconceptions and stigma just by players doing what they love to do. I think the more blind people just learn about blind hockey, the more they'll be educated on what's possible for not just people are blind people who have disabilities in general. So I think the game in itself breaks down barriers and is a testament to the resilience of the athletes but also to what it means to have a disability in 2023, 2024.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Joe hopes to see schools become more understanding of visual impairments and find ways to include these students in recreational activities.

**Joe Fornasier**

I would say it all starts with the schools, having teachers that are willing to accept that their students are visually impaired and partially sighted and have them create alternate things that they can do in gym class because I think gym class was one of my favourite things to do when I was sighted. And something that I dreaded all day, once I lost my sight. Because the teachers that I had pretty much thought 'he's visually impaired, he can't participate, you can't do anything.' And I had a couple of teachers, I'll remember them in grade seven, and grade eight, my phys-ed teachers that would have alternate plans for me. So if people were playing volleyball, he would have me do something else, or people were playing football, he put me as the running back because he knew I couldn't catch the ball. Or he wouldn't put me in that if we were playing soccer. He'd always have an alternate plan so that I could still participate. And I will always still remember those days. And same thing happened in high school, sitting on the sidelines, it's always like the worst thing and it kind of hurt my confidence more than anything that kind of made me think, well, I guess I can't really participate in sport anymore. So I would say it all really starts in school. And I think some teachers need to be more educated that even though people have visual impairments, they can still be elite level athletes and can still participate in gym class and phys-ed classes in certain ways, obviously, if it's safe, but I would say it starts there.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

But the heart of blind hockey lies not just in the game, but in the community it fosters. This is especially true for Mark.

**Mark DeMontis**

My closest friends are blind hockey players, you know, people don't often know what it means to have as a community until you're part of one and there's a lot of people here that felt at one point after they lost their sight, even myself, that we we'd never find community again. And you know, I think that's a big part of it, being a part of a team and a safe and inclusive environment and do all those things while playing the game you love. You know, again, these players are not just family, their friends or community.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Mark wants to share his love for the sport with others, hoping to increase player participation.

**Mark DeMontis**

This sport is my life, it means the world. I mean, it's everyday when I wake up in the morning, the first thing I think about is what I can do to not just play the game, advance the game and ensure there's more opportunities for people to play it.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Four years ago, Mark introduced the sport to me I was player in Canadian Blind Hockey National Team member Chaz Misuraca.

**Chaz Misuraca**

Once I was told I'd be blind for the rest of my life, I got super depressed. I assumed that my life would be unfulfilled and that I wouldn't be able to do anything. Three weeks later, I meet Mark DeMontis. There's a funny story about him telling me just because my eyes don't work doesn't mean my legs stop working, and then I came out to a blind hockey game.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

The blind hockey community inspires hope.

**Chaz Misuraca**

They welcomed me with open arms. I lost my sight four, five years ago, I started playing blind hockey about a month or two right after. I was struggling really hard with having to live my life with very little sight. I come into these rooms with people who have experienced what I've experienced in their own way and yeah, it gave me hope. I see people in here laughing and joking, having normal lives, still out there just crushing life in many different aspects and it opened my eyes quite literally to the potential of life as a blind man.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Mark also introduced Eli Bomers to the sport.

**Eli Bomers**

I originally met Mark DeMontis when I was like four or five, and that's how I learned how to skate. I've been playing blind hockey for probably like four or five years. Everyone's so supportive. You know, everyone, everyone likes playing hockey, you know, we just like having fun, you know.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

The support from players off the ice translates into games where players rely on communication to navigate the rink.

**[Sounds of players communicating with each other during a Toronto Ice Owls game]**

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Nick recognizes different vision levels between him and his teammates.

**Nick Bullick**

Not everybody has the same vision, in fact, everybody's vision is really different. So it's important to let your teammates know where you are on the ice at all times.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

When it comes to playing the game, Luca firmly believes in the importance of communicating with teammates.

**Luca DeMontis**

Teamwork and communication might be two of the most important skills in blind hockey. I feel that they are so important because they make the game accessible for the children and youth, right. Communicating on the ice at any level, in any discipline of hockey, it doesn't matter if you're a professional player in the NHL, or if you're a minor hockey league player, communication is so important.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Chaz also recognizes how big a role communication plays out on the ice.

**Chaz Misuraca**

I'm relying solely on people talking to me, giving me a heads up telling me where someone's going to be, tapping of the stick.

**[Sound of a stick tapping on the ice]**

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Gabriel does the same.

**Gabriel Alves**

We tap our sticks to tell everyone where we are.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

For Joe, recognizing teammates voices is crucial to the game.

**Joe Fornasier**

Knowing everyone's voices is huge. I can't see who's wear and what player is where on the ice, but getting to actually learn all their voices because I can't see their faces is the way that I can distinguish each player from each other. I'd say just memorizing everyone's voice and then always talking, always making noise so we don't run into each other, like 'I'm here, I'm here, I'm here, I'm here, behind you, behind you.' If I can hear the puck and someone's got the puck on their stick, I'm going to tell them 'I'm behind you, I'm to your left and I'm to your right,' so they don't bump into me, they don't make the wrong pass. I think memorizing everyone's voices is our way of knowing people's faces and their numbers on their jerseys and stuff.

**Ted Moritsugu**

My name is Ted Moritsugu. I'm going to be 85 in a couple months, I started playing with the Ice Owls in 2009.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

For Ted, he appreciates being surrounded by people who've gone through similar struggles with losing sight.

**Ted Moritsugu**

It's been fun. It's like it's a different community. If I'm in a gym, and I stumble over back, everyone gets very apologetic. But in this restroom, the usual reaction is 'what's the matter can't just see?' So you know, you don't feel pitied and you also realized that you're not the only one who has a problem.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

To many players like Ted, being a part of a team means everything.

**Ted Moritsugu**

For a lot of them, first time they've ever had a sweater with a name on the back. It really seems to me a lot.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Ice Owls player Joseph Zylak agrees.

**Joseph Zylak**

The blind hockey community's pretty great. Everyone is kind of in the same boat. So it's really enjoyable to get to go out every week and have fun and play and get to participate in the same sport everyone else is playing.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Every Sunday, the Ice Owls players get to become a part of a community.

**Joseph Zylak**

Blind hockey has brought like a sense of community into my life. I'm able to know every week you get to see friends that are in the same situation I am. It allows me to play my favorite sport without having any difficulties. And so has been special for me and my life.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

For Karen Rousseau, the sport helps her mental health.

**Karen Rousseau**

I've been playing blind hockey since 2007. I was looking at a CNIB newsletter and there was a little article, it was a little article about blind hockey and I was like, oh my God, it actually exists. So I was utterly over the moon, over it.

**Karen Rousseau**

I've met lots of people that are very talented, very determined. Hockey is a really important part of my life and it's part of my mental health, so the camaraderie and being included is is huge.

**Karen Rousseau**

Blind hockey opened up a whole world of hockey, modified hockey, but also it got me going in taking other risks and it changed my life. Absolutely.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

The Canadian National Blind Hockey Tournament takes place annually in March at the Mattamy Athletic Centre in Toronto.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

With divisions like open, select, children, youth, low vision and development, all tournament participants range in age. Mark, who plays for Canada's national team, looks forward to the tournament every year.

**Mark DeMontis**

It'll be the 10th anniversary of the National Tournament coming back to Toronto in March 2024.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

People come to attend the tournament from all over the country. Aiden, who plays in the youth division enjoys meeting new people involved in the blind hockey community.

**Aiden Quilty**

Kids of all ages. I know, there's kids who are like eight or nine out here skating right now, and yet there's people who are 50 or 60, who I meet the tournament every year and it's amazing to see.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Luca says the tournament is a celebration.

**Luca DeMontis**

It's a celebration is what it truly is. It's a weekend celebrating the parasport of blind hockey for children, youth and adults from what used to be just from across the country has now turned into a celebration from participants from around the world. We've had participants from many other countries - Finland, Sweden, England, USA and I think we'll get a couple more from some some different countries this year. But it's a weekend where, despite your disability, you have the ability to play in a game that you love.

**Luca DeMontis**

I think the growth we made in the last two, three years has been massive. And I think much of that is a testament to the community, to the players, to the organization, to every single person that believes this sport can change lives. Blind hockey changes lives. I can say that because I've had players tell me it's changed their life. So when I when I get to partake with these conversations, with players who are my friends, I think that's so important when I hear that because it lets me know that we're on the right track. But to say you're on the right track doesn't mean that the track is at the station yet. It means that we have to continue to go and we have to continue to push and continue to create more programmings and continue with awareness. We've had a couple of huge awareness pieces that we've done the last two years and they've helped us find new players. They've helped us grow the organization. But I think that makes us hungry for more. I think that's that's okay to say but yeah, it makes us want more makes us want to create more more awareness, more programs, more events, more tournaments, more of an opportunity for children, youth and adults who are blind and partially sighted to play the game they love.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Throughout the season, players have several other opportunities to take part in competition.

**Wayne St. Denis**

The national level is growing, but we have to get some of the other countries more involved. So more countries can compete at a national level against US and Canada. Hopefully, the goal is to play at a world championship or even in the Paralympics.

**Mark DeMontis**

There's a lot of great programs and events coming up. There's a regional tournament on in Ottawa over December 2023. Then Canada takes on USA in international competition from April 14 to 16th in St. Louis, Missouri. So there again, it's jam packed, not to mention all the programs and everything happening across the country. There's always something and something for everyone.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Luca recognizes how blind hockey has grown tremendously. With teams and programs now spread out throughout the country.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

While the tournaments participation has significantly increased over the last decade, Wayne hopes to see the sport evolve even more globally.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Just as Mark introduced him to the sport, Chaz encourages other blind and partially sighted individuals to get involved.

**Chaz Misuraca**

All skill levels are welcome. Yes, there's a Canadian national team, there's also learn to skates. It's here, it's life changing. Even if hockey is not your sport, come here, you'll meet a bunch of great people who will help you along your life journey in any which way possible.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Graham is appreciative of the team atmosphere.

**Graham Foxcroft**

You're in a team atmosphere. So it helps with building your strength, your courage and just your mindset alone. Knowing that someone else next to you has a vision problem, and they're playing hockey is just works great on someone's confidence and makes them able to do things that they thought they never would be able to do.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Nick also found confidence and a sense of belonging through blind hockey.

**Nick Bullick**

Blind hockey really gives you a sense of confidence almost like you can do anything like you're just a regular person. If blind hockey is not your thing, I would just I would recommend to any visually impaired kid, to just get involved with something. Be part of a community, find a family like I have because I really it goes a long way to be part of something bigger than yourself that makes you feel included.

**Graham Foxcroft**

Come out, take a look at the game. Meet the people and you'll go be introduced to a community that you will never turn back on and you'll love to be a part of.

**Joe Fornasier**

Really like blind hockey outside the game has show me that I still have a purpose, I still have a reason to keep going and to show other people that people with disabilities can really do anything. So it literally is my whole life now. I don't even know how I can quantify it because I don't know what I would be doing with my life if there was no blind hockey. I think it truly like saved my life almost, as crazy as that sounds, because it's just a sport. But it's taken me so far in so many different aspects, being able to show you that they still have purpose, being able to show people that don't have disabilities to chase your dreams no matter what people tell you and no matter how much hate you get doing it. It's hard to quantify it but I'd say it really did save my life.

**Amanda McGee (narrator)**

Beyond Sight through rebounding with sound, it becomes clear that blind hockey is much more than a game, offering players a profound sense of empowerment and community.

**[Closing sounds of a blind hockey game]**