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Grand Valley Lanthorn

GVSU's Independent Voice

Monday, September 10, 2007

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Section Fronts

GV tennis on wheels



Courtesy Photo / Lynn Bender
 Determination: Grand Valley State University students are attempting to organize a wheelchair tennis team that will compete across the country.

By Alicia Wireman
 GVL Copy Editor
 News
 9/5/2007 6:28:36 PM

Four students at Grand Valley State University are taking tennis to a whole new level — on wheels.

The Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association, along with students at GVSU, are developing the first collegiate wheelchair tennis team in the Midwest. The Grand Valley Wheelchair tennis team will call themselves the Rolling Lakers.

The team will be present in front of the Review Board Friday to apply for status as an official GVSU student organization.

"It's a win-win situation for students and for Grand Valley," said Wheelchair Tennis Team Program Director Lynn Bender. "It's encouraging youth and their families to come to Grand Valley where they can play collegiate wheelchair sports."

The GRWSA and the students who will be competing have been planning to begin a collegiate team for awhile now, Bender said. This year was the right time to start

Campus Poll

Will you be visiting the Sept. 11 memorial on campus?

Yes

No

What memorial?

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September 2007

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

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 Low 52°

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a team because the number of GVSU students participating in the GRWSA has been expanding, she said.

“One of our major goals is to eventually host one of the sectional tournaments at Grand Valley,” Bender said. “We also want to eventually offer scholarships to get students to come to Grand Valley.”

Since the Rolling Lakers will be the only collegiate team in the Midwest, traveling is inevitable. The team will compete in three sectional tournaments that will take place in Alabama in October, Kentucky in January and Colorado in February.

Players will be required to attend one of the three sectional tournaments in order to compete in the national tournament, which will be held at the University of Arizona in Tucson in March.

The players’ biggest challenge will be trying to find the funds for traveling expenses, Bender said. Wheelchair tennis helps players gain a greater awareness, increase self-esteem and be a part of a team, she added.

“I love playing tennis,” said Jessica Sporte, president of GVSU’s wheelchair tennis team. “It’s nice to be able to represent Grand Valley in a sport even though I am disabled.”

Sporte helped develop the idea of instituting a collegiate wheelchair tennis team at GVSU. She said playing with her fellow students through the GRWSA program enticed the idea of a university team.

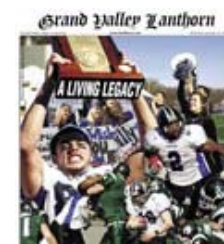
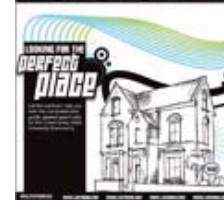
“We just kept talking about starting a team and the idea just sort of snowballed from there,” Sporte said.

Even though the current members are disabled, Sporte said she hopes that able-bodied students or professors will get involved with practices or coaching the team.

“The great thing about wheelchair tennis is that you can play with an able-bodied person,” she said. “We are just encouraging people to get involved with the team spirit and to represent their school in a sport.”

However, there are restrictions as to who can play on the team. Team members must have a disability that inhibits them from playing a collegiate sport, Bender said.

Bryan Wilkinson, vice-president for the team, said he has always been an athletic person, even before his accident. Having a disability does not stop his competitive nature and Wilkinson hopes able-bodied participants will see that, he said.



He said he enjoys playing a sport at the college level despite his disability.

“Eventually able-bodied people who come out to play will see we aren’t really different from anybody else,” Wilkinson said. “We are cognitive people. The only difference is we have a disability that puts us in a chair.”

The Rolling Lakers currently practice outdoors, weather permitting, on Monday and Thursday nights with the GRWSA from 6 to 8 p.m. Monday night practices are held at the Gainey Complex and Thursday night practices will be held at Grandville High School.

For more information on becoming involved with the Rolling Lakers, visit <http://www.grwsa.com> or contact Bender at lynncurt10s@yahoo.com.

awireman@lanthorn.com

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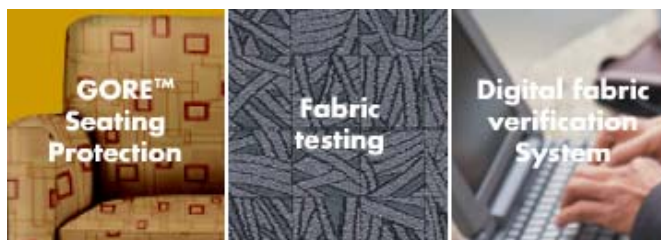
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