

# Daily Record

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2023 | DAILYRECORD.COM



## Kids with physical disabilities struggle with access to sports

Jane Havsy NorthJersey.com | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

Shoulders, arms and hands straining, Mia Emory powered the bright blue racer around the track at the top of Korpi Ice Rink in Bayonne. ● Mia did laps in the long, low-slung wheelchair using both arms, then just her left, to try to build up the muscles to match her dominant right side. By the time the 17-year-old slid out of the seat, she had long since shed the pink jacket she'd worn to keep off the icy chill, and now leaned against the wall to do sit-ups. ● Her 12-year-old middle sister, Sofia, was at the far end of the track working on throws. The youngest sibling, 11-year-old Yiman, lounged on the pole-vault landing pad with her iPad and day-old iPhone, wearing dark sunglasses like a Hollywood starlet. She'd had surgery earlier in the week and had to skip the New Jersey Navigators' first indoor practice. ● Holly and Pete Emory adopted the girls, all of whom have physical disabilities. The Sayreville couple long ago decided physical variance wouldn't keep the girls from being involved with sports. ● But that is easier said than done. **See SPORTS, Page 7A**

### Coming Monday

Limb loss can make being active expensive.

**TOP RIGHT:** Mia Emory of Sayreville uses a racing wheelchair during a New Jersey Navigators practice on April 30, 2022, at Rahway River Park. MICHAEL KARAS/NORTHJERSEY.COM

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Sofia, 12, uses her Permobil electric wheelchair during a family bike ride at Raritan Bay Waterfront Park in South Amboy on Oct. 16, 2022. MITSU YASUKAWA/NORTHJERSEY.COM

**MAIN:** Karam Damra of Parsippany moves around the ice during the New Jersey Devils' youth sled hockey team's practice on Dec. 2, 2022, at Codey Arena in South Orange. ANNE-MARIE CARUSO/NORTHJERSEY.COM



From left, sisters Yiman, Mia and Sofia Emory, who have physical disabilities, enjoy a family bike ride with their father, Pete Emory, at Raritan Bay Waterfront Park in South Amboy on Oct. 16, 2022. MITSU YASUKAWA/NORTHJERSEY.COM

## Sports

Continued from Page 1A

Mia has spina bifida, a birth defect in which part of the spinal column doesn't develop properly. Her legs are paralyzed, and she has endured multiple surgeries since she and her siblings arrived from China about five years ago. Sofia has arthrogryposis, which causes stiff joints. She walks with braces keeping her legs steady and can't lift her arms above chest height. Unlike her sisters, Yiman has what she calls "invisible disabilities." Yiman was born with KBG syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that causes muscle weakness. She also has hearing and vision problems.

Physical activity among children with disabilities is four times lower than their non-disabled peers, according to a 2021 report from the American College of Sports Medicine. But on the Navigators' adaptive track team, the Emorys fit in — and can be athletes.

Specialized equipment, like hand-powered wheelchairs or stabilizing seats, and activity-specific prostheses are often necessary to participate. Such costly aids can't be found at the local sporting goods store, nor are they covered by insurance.

Nonprofits have stepped up to fill the void, usually by providing grants to fund acquisition of running blades, arms that can be used for weightlifting and other adaptive gear. Teams like the Navigators, Children's Lightning Wheels and Philadelphia-based Katie's Komets basketball have chairs that are shared at practice sessions and games.

Mia's racer and hand-operated cycle — which cost thousands of dollars apiece — are both owned by the Navigators, but she's allowed to take them home.

"It's pretty expensive to be an athlete," she said. "Being a para-athlete is more expensive, because we need different types of equipment. It takes a lot of investment. ... You don't shake the tree and get \$20,000."

### Health insurance doesn't cover everything

Many employer-sponsored and Affordable Care Act plans include "medically necessary" prosthetic devices in their Essential Health Benefits, but that coverage is not universally available. Few insurance companies include activity-specific prostheses and equipment, leaving people with disabilities — from children longing to be part of a team to adults seeking wellness — unable to easily get what they need to lead active lives.

"Insurance companies are denying access to what is basic health care," said Nicole Ver Kuilen, a below-knee amputee since age 10 and the manager of public engagement for the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association.

"This is about access to physical activity, and we know physical activity is synonymous with health. It's synonymous with being able to control your weight, preventing obesity, preventing diabetes, managing your stress, cognitive health in young children. The research on the benefits of physical activity is enormous. The disability community has been long forgotten as it relates to this necessary part of health care."

Dave McGill, a vice president at pros-



Karam Damra of Parsippany moves the puck as the New Jersey Devils' sled hockey team practices on Dec. 2, 2022, at Codey Arena in South Orange.

ANNE-MARIE CARUSO/NORTHJERSEY.COM



Mia Emory of Sayreville, a 17-year-old with spina bifida, rides her handcycle at Raritan Bay Waterfront Park in South Amboy on Oct. 16, 2022.

MITSU YASUKAWA/NORTHJERSEY.COM

thesis manufacturer Ossür, pointed out that most amputees are adults, often senior citizens. The insurance reimbursement codes reflect that community, one likely to be covered by Medicare. Kids with limb loss still run, beating up their prostheses in the process, and face the additional challenge of replacing them as they grow.

"There's no language around this for pediatrics, and there are few codes that cover pediatrics," McGill said. "Where are most children covered? A huge percentage of them are covered by Medicaid, and Medicaid programs are not usually flush with cash to spend on secondary health care items. They're paying for what you need to get by and not much else."

### Navigating the system

Every state has an insurance program for children up to age 18.

However, only one state legislature — Maine — has added activity-specific prostheses to insurance coverage. The new law provides devices designed to "maximize the enrollee's ability to ambulate, run, bike and swim and to maximize upper limb function" for people younger than 18.

If New Jersey passed a similar law, that would be a game-changer for kids like Mia, Sofia and Yiman — as well as many of their Navigators teammates.

"That would be a huge barrier to a lot of people coming out and attempting to get their kids involved (in adaptive sports)," said Mia's mom, Holly Emory, a nurse working primarily with geriatric patients for 25 years.

"If they did a quick Google search and saw the cost of the equipment that is needed, I think it would very likely deter a lot of people. 'Maybe next year, we'll set money aside and be able to do it,'" Holly Emory said.

"It's showing up and seeing what other kids have and talking to the coaches and parents. If they didn't (share equipment), we wouldn't be able to play. We wouldn't have the resources."

### Finding an adaptive family

Involvement in sports goes beyond even the obvious benefits of physical activity. It offers a sense of belonging.

That's something 11-year-old Karam Damra of Parsippany likes about the New Jersey Devils youth sled hockey team.

Karam has muscle weakness from treatment for neuroblastoma — a type of nerve-cell cancer — when he was an infant. He uses a wheelchair off the ice, as do most of his teammates, who range in age from 7 to adults in their 40s. Teen stand-up hockey players volunteer to teach skills, push sleds around the ice

and occasionally right them after spills.

It is Karam's third season on the free recreational team, which is primarily sponsored by the Essex County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. The team lent him a sled, which costs about \$800. Karam was given a red-and-black New Jersey Devils No. 99 jersey with his last name on the back, just like the National Hockey League players wear. He has also received other essential gear, like a helmet (\$90); elbow pads and shin guards; gloves (\$50); and a \$100 pair of sticks, each with spikes for maneuvering on one end and a wide, flat edge to play the puck on the other.

"Wheelchair ice hockey is cool because it's kind of the same thing. It's not very different from people standing," Karam said.

Karam has become a big Devils fan, chasing the mascot down in a hallway at a preseason game to pose for photos.

Karam was nicknamed Zoom-Zoom as he speeds down the halls at Central Middle School in Parsippany. The middle-school basketball team will be having tryouts soon, so his elder sister Haya Damra is trying to find a nearby wheelchair team with specialized equipment. When Karam tried to play in his regular chair during gym class, the ball would ricochet away, and he found dribbling and pushing simultaneously to be challenging.

Damra, 23, hopes "to get on the inside" of the nonprofit network and sign Karam up for other adaptive activities.

"People in wheelchairs, it doesn't mean that they can't do anything," Karam said.

### More ways to succeed

Mia Emory is hoping to prove that to people without disabilities as well.

Her Sayreville High School classmates "looked at me like I was joking" when she attended a preseason meeting for the swim team, not knowing she's already competed at Move United nationals and is one of just nine athletes in USA Triathlon's junior para-development program.

Mia received a Challenged Athletes Foundation grant that will allow her to buy her own custom-fitted racer, at a negotiated cost of about \$4,000 — more than \$2,000 off retail. She pondered color options during a recent Navigators practice in Bayonne. Black is her favorite, but she also wants it to be "blinding ... so people can see me coming through," so maybe a touch of red.

Mia also hopes to get her own handcycle, "not just for triathlon, but for life." However, the high-end bike that fits her physical and training needs costs almost \$8,000 retail.

Mia has wanted to represent the United States at the Olympics since watching the Games on TV shortly after emigrating to the United States.

"If I see (the) able-bodied do it, I always think I can do it. I feel like I can do more," Mia said. "I can figure a way to do it. It might not be the same, running on the track with two legs. I use two wheels instead of two legs."

Jane Havsy is a storyteller for the Daily Record and DailyRecord.com, part of the USA TODAY Network. For full access to live scores, breaking news and analysis, subscribe today.

Want to share your story with me? Email: JHavsy@gannett.com Twitter: @dailyrecordspts

# Morristown Beard girls add to New Jersey ice hockey history

**Jane Havsy**

Morristown Daily Record

USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

NEWARK — When Gracie Meyers walked into the Prudential Center before the NJSIAA girls ice hockey final on Monday morning, “the rink looked so big.” Meyers, the Morristown Beard goaltender, felt a little anxious.

Until she stepped out and started skating, realizing quickly, “It’s all ice.”

Meyers preserved a shutout as the Crimson defeated Princeton Day, 7-0, to defend their title. It was the first of five NJSIAA hockey championships on

Monday, as the NJSIAA embraced the girls game for the first time.

When Morristown Beard beat Summit at the Prudential Center two years ago, it was an independent statewide tournament. The final was held in conjunction with an annual girls all-star game sponsored by the New Jersey Devils, the day before the boys’ finals.

Being “involved in the big picture” added a little more meaning to this second title for Morristown Beard coach Bruce Driver, who wore the girls’ state championship ring on his left hand and the ring he earned when the Devils won the 1995 Stanley Cup on his right.

Girls hockey will have its own NJSIAA-approved division — or maybe two — next season. It is slated to be named after former Chatham athletic director and current Watchung Hills principal Bill Librera. Librera ushered the Chatham-Madison co-op into existence in 2016, and was a driving force behind the inaugural girls state tournament.

Librera was among the dignitaries who presented the NJSIAA trophy to Morristown Beard captains Leah Stecker, Logan Sutera and Katie Ewig.

“It’s the same feeling I had when we won the first state championship,” said

Penn State-bound Stecker, a Randolph resident who had four goals and an assist on Monday.

“The game is growing, and it’s exciting to be the first of everything. I can’t really explain the feeling.”

Though most of the current Crimson juniors and seniors were on the roster for the 2020 championship, these players came into Monday’s final with a different attitude. After defeating Princeton Day (14-6) on the road in January, Morristown Beard had lost to the Panthers in a Prep semifinal and was shut

**See HOCKEY, Page 2B**

# Hockey

Continued from Page 1B

out by Hoosac, a boarding school in New York, in the final of its multi-state league.

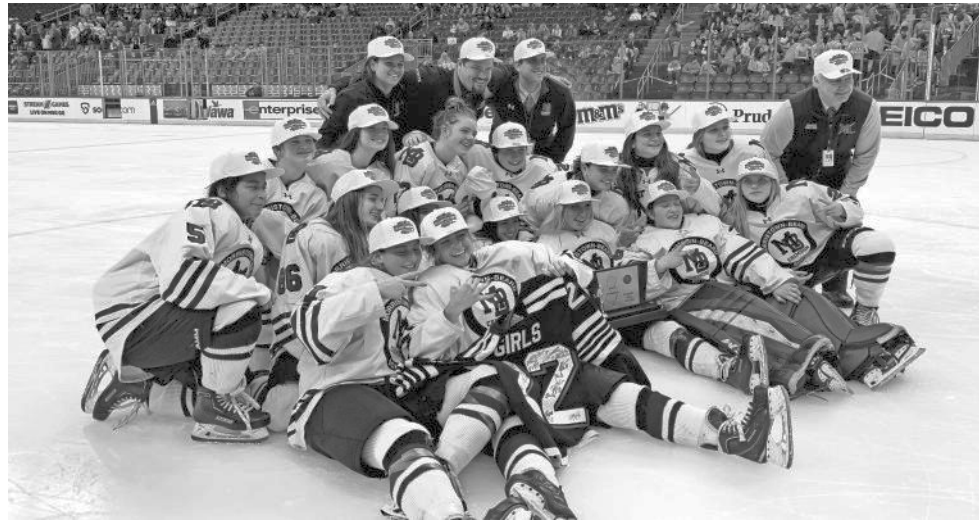
“Last time we lost, and didn’t play very well,” said Meyers, who stopped all 11 of the Panthers’ shots. “I tried to work harder and get what I wanted. ... When you’re here, it’s a great experience. But you have to use your mind and keep pumped. It’s just ice.”

## Building hockey’s future

These big games are what Driver had envisioned when he helped launch the Morristown Beard girls program in the 2000-01 season. The Crimson joined Pingry and Princeton High School when it was founded, as well as independent Lawrenceville, Stuart Country Day and Princeton Day.

There are currently 14 girls hockey teams at NJSIAA member schools in six counties, with more in development.

The National Federation of State High School Associations’ first reference to girls hockey is in a 1973-74 par-



**Morristown Beard celebrates after winning their second NJSIAA girls ice hockey championship after defeating Princeton Day, 7-0, on Monday at the Prudential Center in Newark.** COURTESY OF JOANNE DZAMA/MORRISTOWN BEARD SCHOOL

ticipation survey, with 96 players at 26 schools. The first New Jersey team is listed two years later, just one with 25 players.

That number ballooned to 9,650 players on 642 girls-only teams nationwide in the 2018-19 school year.

However, girls ice hockey doesn’t crack the top 10 in schools or partici-

pants, lagging behind better-established sports such as volleyball, soccer and swimming.

New Jersey had 395 female players in that NFHS survey, though no teams were counted – probably because the NJSIAA had yet to officially sanction girls ice hockey. However, according to data going back to the 2002-03 school

year, the number of girls teams in New Jersey grew from six to 19.

“I point to the U.S. Olympic team. The women’s team has done well for 20 years,” said Driver, a Canadian who lives in Montville. “There’s been more focus on those athletes and more focus on female athletes as a whole. It’s great for the girls to have the opportunity.”

Morristown Beard (17-3-1) and Princeton Day were the two top seeds in this year’s tournament. The Crimson scored 17 goals and allowed just two in three playoff games. They end the season having won eight of their last nine.

“I almost started crying on the ice,” said Sutera, a senior forward from Jefferson who scored twice in the final.

“Being with new people every year, getting close with them, it’s amazing. It promotes for other girls who want to play hockey. It grows the game. It kind of stresses me out a little, trying to be the positive one. It’s kind of hard, but I try to look past everything and see the freshmen and sophomore girls be happy. I know I’m going to remember this my entire life. I didn’t start this, but I was here at the beginning. It’s surreal.”

*Email: JHavsy@gannett.com Twitter: @dailyrecordspts*

## Big enough stage?



Mount Olive's Anthony Brutico jumps in the long jump at the NJSIAA Unified Track and Field Championships on June 8 at Franklin High School. ALEXANDER LEWIS/MYCENTRALJERSEY

## How inclusive is Special Olympics Unified program?

**Jane Havsy**

Morristown Daily Record | USA TODAY NETWORK

Wherever Rosemary Parisi goes in Mount Olive, she meets people who know her daughter, Gabriella.

GiGi, who has Down syndrome, was a year-round, general-education athlete at Mount Olive High School and Homecoming queen. She even appeared on a Times Square billboard, sponsored by the National Down Syndrome Society.

Sports have been key to GiGi's popularity, surprising even Rosemary, a special education teacher at MacKinnon Middle School in Wharton.

GiGi was part of the Mount Olive field hockey, basketball and softball teams alongside her neurotypical peers. She also participates with Mount Olive's Spe-

cial Olympics Unified track and field program, which blends students with intellectual disabilities and neurotypical partners.

Unified clubs, teams and events often require lower time commitments than their general-education equivalents. But there are few limitations on what can be called Unified, or how inclusive those programs should be.

David May of Morristown thinks Unified is more restrictive than promised by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. The related Individuals with Disabilities Education Act makes free appropriate public

**See PROGRAM, Page 7A**

# Program

Continued from Page 1A

education available to more than 7.5 million eligible children with disabilities — in the least restrictive environment — and ensures special education and related services.

May would prefer students with special needs to compete alongside gen-ed athletes on a single team. But Unified does not allow in-season varsity athletes to be team partners, so their background and experience with activities vary.

“All Unified has done is make it the most restrictive environment in the entire place,” May said. “Some parents are just happy their kids are active, and don’t have the nuance of what it means to be separated onto the Unified team and not connected to the other [gen-ed] team. ... It did give kids opportunities to play sports, but it is not the least restrictive environment.”

## Separate but unequal?

Autism never prevented Ryan May from being part of the Morristown swim team, which has included several swimmers with physical and intellectual disabilities over the years. David May packed breakfast and drove Ryan to 6 a.m. practice nearly every school day for six years.

Ryan participated in about half the meets during his high school career, wearing the same burgundy suit and bright orange cap as everyone else on the roster. Between events, he usually cheered on teammates from the end of the bleachers closest to the starting blocks. Ryan, who turns 24 in July, didn’t talk much, but usually smiled and gave two thumbs up.

“What I tell parents who first get diagnosed, whether it’s Down syndrome or autism or something else: ‘You’ll always be their parent. What you have to become is a crazed advocate,’” said May, who co-founded Kids2Kids, a Morristown nonprofit that mentors children with special needs through activities led by neurotypical peers.

“If you have a special-needs kid, you realize very early on how isolated you are,” he said. “They do not get invited to anything: birthday parties, events. ... It’s so painful to not have these kids be



**Mount Olive’s Andrew Lucas competes in the long jump at the NJSIAA Unified Track and Field Championships on June 8 at Franklin High School.**

ALEXANDER LEWIS/MYCENTRALJERSEY

involved in anything.”

Trying to provide opportunities to a larger population of student-athletes, the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association announced a partnership with Special Olympics New Jersey at the Meet of Champions in June 2016. At the time, there were about 60 Unified Champion Schools, promoting acceptance, respect and dignity for all students.

There are more than 250 in New Jersey now, and Bill DePonte, chief operating officer of SONJ, hopes to have at least 300 in the fall.

“Inclusion has been around a long time, and it means different things to different people,” DePonte said. “For us, it’s about engaging individuals of all abilities.”

Champion Schools are supported through funding from the United States and New Jersey education departments, though DePonte said they’re encouraged to become self-sufficient. SONJ grants support things like coach and club-adviser stipends, uniforms, travel, officials and technology.

The NJSIAA currently sponsors Unified basketball and bowling in the winter, and spring track and field. Unified swimming will be added to the list this winter, with a mixed relay expected to be held during the NJSIAA Meet of Champions in March.

“It’s cool to meet new people and get into different activities,” said Pennsauken freshman Jeremiah Moses, who plans to try out for the soccer team in the fall. “I bring good energy, good sportsmanship, just good vibes all around. We’re like a huge family.”

Sparta and Mount Olive were the top two large schools at the inaugural free-standing NJSIAA Unified Track and Field Championships on June 8 at Franklin High School. Morristown won the small-school division.

In past years, the handful of Unified events were mixed into the Group championships schedule, dividing teams into multiple sites.

“After 50 years of being in business, Special Olympics knows it needs to do better,” said Kelly Anne Kieffer, assistant principal at Voorhees High School, the first in New Jersey to be recognized as a national Unified Champion School.

“Unified is a way to do that,” Kieffer said. “The students I’m supporting would not be able to do sports or be in the play without Unified. ... We have some significant [disabled] students, and they would not be able to access the least restrictive environment, not for a second. Our main objective is every student should be able to access their high school experience to the best of their ability.”

## Best of both worlds

Rosemary Parisi said GiGi “flourished” once she got to high school because of sports. She loved field hockey so much that Rosemary bought her a stick, balls and a net so she could practice in the family’s yard. She scored 150 points in her basketball career, getting into both varsity and JV games “if they’re winning big or losing big,” Rosemary said.

GiGi got into softball three years ago, and though she rarely got into a game due to safety concerns, Rosemary Parisi said “her role is being in the dugout, cheering on all the girls, helping the coach [Bill Romano] when he gets too stressed.”

“It takes a lot to be on a gen-ed team: a lot of stamina, understanding, good behavior, good health,” Rosemary Parisi said. “You have to have a coach who supports it. You have to have an aide in the background should anything happen. If there are health issues, people have to be trained. We all worked very hard to make it happen. GiGi is the poster child for inclusion in a sports team, but that’s just because we struck it right. Not everybody can do that.”

GiGi is now 22 and just graduated from Mount Olive High School. Rosemary Parisi hopes her daughter can volunteer as a peer mentor or coach for the Unified program in the fall to keep “the camaraderie of a team.”

That’s one thing Michael McCloskey was seeking when he joined the cross-country, bowling and spring track teams at West Milford High School. But when he tried out for Team New Jersey ahead of the Special Olympics USA Games, Gina McCloskey told her son, “This is your time to shine. This is your place.”

Michael McCloskey, a sophomore who has autism and a seizure disorder, wound up on ESPN’s social-media feeds after a last-second comeback in his heat of the 1,500 meters on June 7.

For three weeks leading up to the USA Games, McCloskey went from gen-ed track practice to Special Olympics practice on Tuesdays and Thursdays — often accompanied at both by senior Chase Appell and junior Wyatt Space, longtime West Milford Unified partners. On Sundays, Gina McCloskey drove her son and Destiny Gerety of Hewitt to two-hour Team New Jersey practices in Point Pleasant.

“Special Olympics gives everyone a place to be themselves, completely. You don’t have to put on any kind of show for anyone else,” said West Milford Special Olympics coach Kristi Clave, who teaches multiple disabilities classes at Maple Road Elementary in West Milford.

“Unified changes cultures if you do it right,” Clave said. “If you find a couple of really great kids, and a couple of partners who are not involved in anything ... you put them on that team, and you give them purpose. You will change their lives. Not just the kids with special needs, but those kids who never felt needed and never felt loved, it will make them all a part of something.”

Email: [JHavsy@gannett.com](mailto:JHavsy@gannett.com)

Twitter: [@dailyrecordspts](https://twitter.com/dailyrecordspts)



Chatham goaltender Michael Park stays focused against Mendham in the third period during the Essex County Holiday Tournament at Codey Arena in West Orange in December. PHOTOS BY MITSU YASUKAWA/NORTHJERSEY.COM

## ‘Odd one out’

Asian hockey players diversifying the ice in NJ

**Jane Havsy**

Morristown Daily Record

USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

When Lucas Krzanowski was called an anti-Asian slur by an opponent during a high school hockey game, he wasn't sure it had actually happened. The other player skated by and tossed the insult at the Morristown Beard freshman.

Krzanowski, whose father is Polish and mother is Taiwanese, didn't know what to do next. He told an older, larger teammate he'd been insulted, and the other player promised to "make sure it wouldn't happen again."

After the game, he shared the incident with Morristown Beard head coach Scott Greene. Krzanowski identifies as mixed race and jokingly said, "I was only half offended."

But even though Krzanowski "used it as fuel to push back even harder," the insult still stung.

"I was just taken aback by it," he said. "Really? Did that really just happen? ... It's definitely not cool. You can judge me by anything else, if I made a bad play. But don't bring that into it."

Krzanowski is one of a small but growing number of New Jersey hockey players with Asian ancestry — part of a proliferation of winter sports athletes who are on full display at the Olympics in Beijing.

But while Asian men swept the medals in men's figure skating, and Korean-American snowboarder Chloe Kim won her second gold medal, there has typically been less representation on the hockey rink.

According to USA Hockey data, roughly



Henry Park, the father of Chatham goaltender Michael Park, watches the game against Mendham with his younger son, Gabriel.

2% of registered youth and amateur hockey players in the United States identify as Asian. In the NHL-NHLPA "Learn to Play" program in New Jersey, about 10% of the players are Asian.

Karen Tom and Henry Park are trying to boost those numbers.

Tom grew up in Canada playing ringette. But many of her college friends transitioned to hockey and represented Canada on its first women's Olympic team at the 1998 Games in Nagano, Japan.

A third-generation Canadian, Tom relocated first to California, and then to Madison in Morris County in 2008. Both her sons, Jett and Keaton, were part of multiple championship teams at Madison High School. She helped launch the Chatham-Madison girls hockey team in the 2016-17 season, and se-

See PLAYERS, Page 10A

# Players

Continued from Page 1A

cured funding for Madison to be independent. She's also a coach for the Harding-Madison youth girls program, and coach of the Madison High boys junior varsity team.

Tom believes she's the only Asian and almost certainly the only Asian female Level 4 USA Hockey coach. She believes her gender, not ancestry, attracts attention when she's behind the bench.

"My kids are not immune to it, but they're not maybe as sensitive to it," said Tom, 50, a physical therapist and certified strength and conditioning specialist.

"They didn't grow up with a bunch of racial tension, nor did I. My eldest brother, he's five years older than me, and he had quite a bit of stuff in high school, but I really haven't. I have feelings about stuff like that, but I was never really a victim of any of it."

Park got both his sons, Gabriel and Michael, on skates when they were 4 or 5 years old. He even coached them both early on.

The Chatham resident acknowledges that hockey — and lacrosse, which Michael also plays — are "very Caucasian sports."

Gabriel, 20, was a defenseman, and Henry Park has seen him get taunted on the ice. Not so for Michael, now a Chatham senior goaltender.

But that doesn't mean he hasn't heard unwelcome comments.

More than 60% of the 10,370 anti-Asian incidents reported between March 2020 and September 2021 involved verbal harassment, according to the national coalition Stop AAPI Hate.

"Physically, you are the odd one out of the group," Michael Park said. "Especially in a new environment or a new team, you're the only one who is quote-unquote different. In my experience, there's always going to be jokes that get thrown around, but it comes more from people not resonating with what it's like. ... I don't think it comes out of animosity or being racist. Most kids don't really understand what it's like not to be part of the majority."

Henry Park has also seen more players and coaches with Asian surnames as Michael has continued his hockey career. Both Park and Tom say athletics are not usually emphasized in Asian households, particularly in the immigrant generation.

But as the transplants have become more established and successful in the United States, they are more able to ex-



Goalie Keaton Tom of Madison with the Halvorsen Cup after the team defeated Roxbury, 5-0, at Mennen Arena in Morristown last March. CHRIS PEDOTA/NORTHJERSEY.COM

pose their children to expensive sports such as hockey.

Athletics have also become another route to achieve what Henry Park described as "the Asian American dream": getting into a better-quality college.

"When it came to first-generation, the way my parents were, they deemphasized sports," said Park, who emigrated from Korea when he was a few months old.

"For them, doing well in high school in order to achieve and get into a good college and get a good job was the most important thing. Sports, in general, wasn't very important," he said. Now, "you're seeing a lot more of those kids, the third-generation kids, playing sports, whether it's hockey or lacrosse or what you would think of as historically very white sports."

Whether at Morristown Beard or on his New Jersey Devils travel team, Krzanowski isn't the only Asian player on the roster. Michael Chang of St. Joseph Regional says he's the only player of Asian ancestry on the varsity team, but that there are three on the New York Saints, his club team.

"I haven't given much thought to being Asian and playing hockey. It's something that has always been, for me," said Chang, a junior forward from Montville whose mother was born in China and father in Korea. "I enjoy playing the game. When I'm on the ice, I feel like nothing

matters, and I have fun playing."

## History of representation

On March 13, 1948, Larry Kwong became the first player of Asian descent to skate in a National Hockey League game. Born in British Columbia, Kwong played one shift for the New York Rangers on the road in Montreal.

Jim Paek, who was born in Seoul, South Korea, and grew up in Toronto, was the first Asian player to have his name etched on the Stanley Cup, winning back-to-back NHL championships in 1991 and 1992 with Pittsburgh.

Thirty-one Asian players have appeared in at least one NHL game, including 10 this season. New Jersey Devils defenseman Jonas Siegenthaler is believed to be the first NHL player of Thai descent, through his mother.

Current players such as Minnesota defenseman Matt Dumba, who is part Filipino, co-founded the Hockey Diversity Alliance. It was formed in June 2020 "to eradicate systemic racism and intolerance" and promote diversity in the game.

In a nationally televised address before the 2020 playoffs, Dumba said the NHL and HDA want kids to feel "safe, comfortable and free-minded every time they enter an arena."

Krzanowski has noticed Montreal Canadiens center Nick Suzuki, who is Japanese and Scottish, and Edmonton Oilers right wing Kailer Yamamoto, who is part Japanese and native Hawaiian.

The NHL will celebrate Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May for the second consecutive year, part of the league's "Hockey is for Everyone" campaign. Some teams will engage with specific demographic groups in their markets. The league is also conducting an employee demographic study, which will include race and ethnicity.

"It's definitely an inspiration to see guys out there, especially some of these guys who are putting up pretty good points. It's representation I can see," Krzanowski said. "That's pretty awesome for people who happen to be Asian, too, to say, 'If this guy can do it, so can I.'"

Email: [JHavsy@gannett.com](mailto:JHavsy@gannett.com) Twitter: [@dailyrecordspts](https://twitter.com/dailyrecordspts)

**KOHLER** Walk-In Bath