



IMPACT Athlete

Nico 'Ironman' lemma

By: Joe Millage

Although only 11 years old and in grade six, this young athlete is already ramping things up in the boccia world.

When you first meet Nico 'Ironman' lemma, his passion for boccia is obvious. Boccia is a game of skill, focus and precision that can be made accessible for all. Unique to Nico is his path to get into sport. Locally there were few opportunities to practice or play boccia with a club, but Nico got to work and recruited his dad to help start one. Together they created the Boccia Busters program for athletes in Durham Region.

Like many parents, the lemmas knew their son liked sports but they didn't have experience in the world of athletes with special needs to get started or even know what was available. But one day while watching TV, Nico saw a commercial that promoted boccia. He immediately turned to his computer, looking up the sport online, and so began his pathway to boccia excellence... one that would uniquely include building a community-based club.

Boccia Busters quickly grew to seven members. When asked what made that happen Nico responded, "Give me my computer and let me get to work." Access to online resources and social groups has helped the program grow since its inception. Nico can use a special interface at home to help get full use out of his computer and it has greatly impacted the program's ability to grow.

One of Nico's favourite stories speaks to competing at the 2019 Ontario Parasport Games in Durham. His entire class came out to cheer him on.

Nico and his father Patrick recently led the boccia program at the Rotary Club of Whitby ParaSport® Festival. There, they were recipients of the ParaSport® Ontario Play to Podium Fund and left with a new ramp and boccia set to help grow the Boccia Busters program.

This year, the Boccia Busters will travel to tournaments in Niagara,



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Toronto, London and Ottawa, finishing the season with a big trip to Montreal to compete in the renowned Défi sportif, an annual competition that brings elite and up-and-coming athletes together for a variety of sporting events.

Their practice schedule is growing but the club is having difficulty finding a space to train. Currently their church is making space available and they continue to look for gym time in accessible schools and community centres. Nico and his dad source a lot of practice ideas online and have created a fun home practice program that resembles the custom of youth hockey players playing on backyard rinks. Boccia is Nico's passion and has taken control of his sporting interest by creating opportunities for himself and others.

If you would like to support the efforts being made to fund adaptive equipment and wish to donate to the Play to Podium Fund contact ParaSport Ontario's Executive Director, Jeff Tiessen, at jeff@parasportontario.ca.

ParaSport Ontario is committed to sharing stories of community builders like the lemmas. To share your story contact our Communications Manager, Erin O'Sullivan, at erin@parasportontario.ca.

The fundraising goal in 2020 is to provide \$100,000 in adaptive equipment to community groups and individuals. Founding partners in the program include Sunrise Medical Canada Inc., Durham Medical, Unique Inventions, Ossur, Prosthetic Energy Inc., and the Para Pro-Am Golf Tournament.