



*Friends of Adaptive Athletics at Penn State*

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*We Are... Inclusive. Competitive. United.*









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# Case for Support

## *Friends of Adaptive Athletics at Penn State*

### WHY RISE ABOVE

**Rise Above** is more than a nonprofit. It's a movement to ensure that student-athletes of all abilities at Penn State are seen, supported, and celebrated — not as an exception, but as essential to the university's athletic identity. We are the 501(c)(3) organization exclusively dedicated to restoring, revitalizing, and redeveloping Penn State's **Adaptive Athletics program**. Our vision is equity, excellence, and belonging — on the field, in the classroom, and throughout life.

We are building the future of adaptive sports at one of the nation's most iconic institutions — and we're doing it together.

### OUR ORIGIN STORY: From Dormancy to Determination

Founded in 2022 by alumni, Paralympians, and champions of inclusion, Rise Above was born out of urgent need. Penn State's Ability Athletics program — once nationally recognized under the pioneering leadership of Coach Teri Jordan — had gone silent during the pandemic and following her retirement. Concerned that the program might disappear entirely, a passionate network came together to not just save it, but to reimagine what it could become.

**Rise Above is the result of that vision: a fully independent nonprofit, working in partnership with Penn State's ICA and Adaptive Athletics program to ensure these athletes have the opportunity to thrive.**

### OUR MISSION

To support the **restoration**, **revitalization**, and **redevelopment** of Adaptive Athletics at Penn State by providing scholarships, training resources, visibility, community connection, and national leadership in inclusive collegiate sports.



## OUR PROGRESS: From Vision to Victory

Just two years ago, the program had no athletes and no coaching staff.

Today, thanks to Rise Above's efforts:

- ✓ **6 Adaptive Student-Athletes** are proudly representing Penn State.
- ✓ A competitive sled hockey team has been developed.
- ✓ A **full-time coach** and **part-time wheelchair basketball coach** are leading daily training and recruitment.
- ✓ The program has launched its first wheelchair basketball team.
- ✓ Athletes are competing nationally — and aiming for the **Paralympics**.
- ✓ A **sold-out benefit event** in 2025 hosted by **Sue Paterno** and **Dana Harris** drew over **275 attendees** and raised **\$75,000**.
- ✓ The **2025 Recruiting Class** is the program's largest and most elite ever.
- ✓ The **first wheelchair basketball camp** at Penn State launched in 2025 with top national coaches.

**This is just the beginning.**

## WHY IT MATTERS



**Athletes like Max Malec**, an incoming first-year student from Roaring Brook, PA, aren't just here to play — they're here to make history. Born with spina bifida, Max is a multi-sport athlete who plays sled hockey and throws javelin while dreaming of one day becoming a sports broadcaster.

"It's an incredible program — it's allowed me to call myself a Penn State student-athlete."

— *Max Malec*

Other athletes — like **Esther Faith Henn**, **Lee Asher**, **Lucas Resch**, **Angel Guzman** and **Jack Cunningham** — are earning national recognition and chasing Paralympic dreams. Together, they represent the growing national movement of adaptive athletes rewriting the script on who belongs in college sports.

## WHAT WE FUND

Rise Above raises funds to:

- ★ **Provide scholarships and tuition assistance.**
- ★ **Purchase adaptive equipment and training gear.**
- ★ **Support travel for national competition.**
- ★ **Host intramural, elite, and youth adaptive sports teams, events and camps.**
- ★ **Promote program visibility through media and community events.**
- ★ **Foster collaboration between Penn State, local schools, and Commonwealth Campuses.**

## OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

In five years, we envision:

- ★ Penn State recognized nationally as the **gold standard** in adaptive athletics.
- ★ Host intramural, elite and youth adaptive sports teams, events and camps.
- ★ Every adaptive athlete has **fair access** to coaching, competition, and scholarships.
- ★ Integrate Adaptive athletics outreach University wide and throughout Pennsylvania.
- ★ A thriving adaptive sports culture **integrated** into PSU's athletic identity — not siloed.
- ★ A **national ripple effect**, with universities modeling after PSU's leadership

## WHY YOUR SUPPORT IS VITAL

This is not about charity. It's about building a model for equity in higher education and athletics. Adaptive Athletics is often called the *"Title IX movement of our era"* — and Penn State, with Rise Above, is positioned to lead the way.

Your investment in Rise Above supports:

- ★ Individual transformation through sports and education.
- ★ Cultural change in collegiate athletics.
- ★ A future where inclusion is instinctive, not an afterthought.

**You can be the reason Penn State rises — and every athlete rises with it.**

## OUR INVITATION

Join us as we make history. With your support, we will ensure that Rise Above becomes not only the best-in-class support system for Penn State's adaptive athletes — but a national model for what inclusive collegiate athletics can and should be.

## VISIT [WWW.RISEABOVEABILITY.COM](http://WWW.RISEABOVEABILITY.COM)

**Mail checks to:**

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CASE FOR SUPPORT

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