

The rookie

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

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TRENDING

Legal troubles pile up for local food entrepreneur Jonny Hunter

The closing of Underground Butcher and Forequarter are just outward signs of deeper legal troubles surrounding Underground founder Jonny Hunter. Back taxes and several lawsuits are pending.

Civic envy

Many Madisonians have long pined for a public market and a modern mass transit system. Meanwhile, roughly 80 miles away, Milwaukee



CHRIS BACARELLA

Stephanie Schwartzkopf: “When I joined, everybody connected with me right away. It didn’t matter who I was, deaf or not deaf. Everyone gets a lot of support here, no matter who you are.”

Stephanie Schwartzkopf glides across the rink, kicking up shaved ice as she makes her debut as a hockey player. She can see her teammates on the Black Mirror hockey team pump their fists in support, but she can’t hear their cheers: Schwartzkopf is the [Madison Gay Hockey Association’s](#) first deaf player.

has ticked both off of its to-do list. How did the city do it and what can Madison learn?

Labor dispute

Negotiations with newly unionized workforce at the Willy Street Co-op is turning contentious. The union is ramping up pressure against the co-op’s management, and does not rule out the possibility of a strike.

How high-speed trains were derailed

WPR’s Derailed podcast shares a lot about what happened to the proposed high-speed rail link between Milwaukee and Madison. But there’s more to the story.

It was 20 years ago today...

Hook’s Cheese will release its second-ever 20-year aged cheddar in 2020. Sign up Jan. 1 for its Memorial Day weekend release.

“I was so nervous before I joined,” says Schwartzkopf, who moved to Madison from Colorado in 2017 and joined the league in August. “I thought, ‘How are they going to receive me? How are they going to look at me?’ But when I joined, everybody connected with me right away. It didn’t matter who I was, deaf or not deaf. Everyone gets a lot of support here, no matter who you are.”

Schwartzkopf had never played hockey before joining the 13-year-old league. But she’s a lifelong fan of the sport, which she followed with her dad, who died in April.

“My dad is the reason I decided to join this league,” Schwartzkopf says through a sign-language interpreter. “My dad and I loved hockey together, and I believe he’d be proud to see me play. That’s also why I decided to put my last name on my jersey. We can choose anything to put on our jerseys, but I wanted a name that was my dad’s.”

Schwartzkopf had long wanted to play hockey, but says her father always worried about her safety on the ice “because there’s a lot of hearing you have to do. You have to listen to the referee and the coach — and how could I communicate in that situation?”

But the Gay Hockey Association is a no-contact league, alleviating concerns about checking. The league assigned Schwartzkopf to Black Mirror because its captain, Kate Walton, knows sign language. Her teammates have been learning as well.

“If I’m ever on the wrong side of the rink or am doing something I shouldn’t and can’t hear the whistle, my teammates get into action,” says Schwartzkopf. “They’ll look at me and I’ll look at them and they will sign ‘Here’ and ‘Off’ and gesture to where I should go. We can actually communicate pretty quickly.”

So far, Schwartzkopf is the only deaf player in the league, but her involvement epitomizes its guiding principle: inclusion. Patrick Farabaugh founded the league in 2006 for people of all genders, sexual identities and abilities.

“When I started the league, I actually avoided recruiting people who already knew how to play,” Farabaugh says. “One of the barriers of access is a hyper-competitive culture. I wanted the priority to be inclusion over winning. If a new player scores a goal here, both teams on the ice are cheering them on.”

In June, the NHL showcased the league in a Pride Month [video](#). The league continues to grow, adding 70 players this year, including 40 who had never played hockey. There are now 192 players, making it the largest gay hockey league in the world.

Schwartzkopf isn't the only player with a disability. Kiki Schultz, who also joined this year, has systemic juvenile arthritis, a potentially fatal disease that makes it difficult — and scary — for Schultz to be active.

“I fell on the ice multiple times the first few practices,” says Schultz, who plays for the Blue Moon. “But it's been exciting to explore what my body can do in a supportive space and watching Steph soar has been amazing. Being disabled myself, it was cool to know we had a deaf player in the league. It made me feel less alone.”

As her debut game ends with a loud buzzer, the captain signals to Schwartzkopf that it's over. Black Mirror lost 0-2, but Schwartzkopf is grinning from ear to ear.

“I wish my dad could see me play, but everyone in the league cheers for me, even if my skills aren't really there,” says Schwartzkopf. “They always say, ‘You rock girl!’ and I feel that in my heart.”

14: Teams in the Madison Gay Hockey Association.

Notable team names: Dumpster Fire, The Shrek Republic, The Devils Wear Prada, It Ain't Easy Bein' Cheesy and Sacre Bleu!

April 24-26, 2020: Tournament hosted by the league that draws teams from around the country.

James Kyte: First and only legally deaf person to play in the NHL, with stints on the Winnipeg Jets, Pittsburgh Penguins, Calgary Flames, Ottawa Senators and San Jose Sharks.

[*Editor's note: This article has been edited to include updated dates for the association's 2020 tournament.*]

SNAPSHOT LGBT



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COMMENTS (3)

Stephanie's Drive

Steph, we are so proud of you... Way to go, girl!!

Your Uncle Bob and Aunt Chris (Ohio)

Christina Apple 16 days ago | [REPLY](#)

Stephanie's Drive

I could not be more proud of Stephanie. You can do anything you want my dear! With the support of your family hear or in heaven. I love you! You rock!

Marlena 17 days ago | [REPLY](#)

Stephanie's deive

I am so proud of you!! This is awesome! I love all of this. I love you. He is watching and very proud!!!

Uncle Lance 15 days ago | [REPLY](#)

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