

## **Mr. Taylor Lipsett**

### **Three-time Paralympic Medal Winner and Voting Member of the USA Hockey Board of Directors**

*Interview conducted by*

*Matthew Davis*

*On May 3, 2018 from Denton, Texas*

Disability Studies Minor

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## **Biography**

Taylor Lipsett was born in Texas in 1987, growing up in Mesquite, Texas. At the age of five he was diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta, more commonly known as brittle bones. He went on to graduate from Southern Methodist University and eventually settled in McKinney, Texas. He is married with a three-year-old daughter and another daughter on the way.

Mr. Lipsett's interest in sled hockey first began following the Paralympic Games in Salt Lake City, Utah, when he met a relative of a player from the U.S. national team. He would eventually be selected to replace an injured player on Team U.S.A. which began a ten-year career as a player, in which he earned a Bronze medal at the Torino Games in 2006 and Gold medals in the Vancouver and Sochi Games in 2010 and 2014, respectively.

He now serves as a voting member on the U.S.A. Hockey Board of Directors representing the Disabled Hockey Section which endeavors to bring attention to and develop various disciplines of sled hockey. Aside from working with U.S.A. Hockey he is also involved with the Southwest Wheelchair Athletic Association (SWAA) program which provides funding, gear and access to people wishing to get involved in sled hockey.

## **Topics discussed**

- Personal background
- Diagnosis of osteogenesis imperfecta
- Southwest Wheelchair Athletic Association sled hockey program
- USA Hockey, Disabled Hockey Section
- Approach to and reception of disabled hockey outside the United States
- Growth of disabled hockey in the United States

- Support System
  - Accessibility
  - Paralympic Movement
- 

**Davis**

This is Matthew Davis interviewing Taylor Lipsett for the UT Arlington, Texas Disability Oral History Project. Today's date is May 3rd, 2018 and I'm on the phone with Mr. Lipsett to talk about his life and experience with adapted sports and in particular sled hockey. Thank you for participating in the university's oral history program.

**Lipsett**

Of course.

**Davis**

If you don't mind, to start would you mind telling us a little bit just about your background?

**Lipsett**

Yeah, yeah, so I was actually born and raised here in north Texas. I grew up in Mesquite and then stayed there throughout my school years and then went to SMU here in Dallas for my undergrad (coughs). Got married right before I graduated undergrad and then we kind of bounced around various areas of North Texas from Rockwall to Richardson to Plano and now we live in McKinney. So, we keep going north, I think (laughs).

**Davis**

(Laughs)

**Lipsett**

I'm married. We've been married for nine years and we've got a three-year-old and are expecting another one in October.

**Davis**

Oh, wow.

**Lipsett**

There's kind of a quick rundown of family life.

I was diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta at the age of five. I first... which is also known as brittle bones. I first started breaking bones at one and a half. It took them three and a half years to kind of figure out what was going on, but between the ages of one and a half to twelve, I had close to ninety breaks over that timeframe and about twenty-five surgeries to fix the brakes, put rods in, and replace rods and all that kind of fun stuff. And then, had surgery each summer during high school to put permanent rods in all four major bones in my legs where they went in and essentially broke the bones into a number of pieces and threaded them down a rod and put the rod back in to help straight, straighten and strengthen the bones and fortunately for me, I haven't, (coughs) other than a couple of hockey related breaks I haven't really broken anything since I was about fourteen.

So, it's kind of one of the characteristics of the disease is that it slows down as you go through puberty and age a little bit and then we'll see what it does as I keep aging, but the past fifteen years or so has been relatively quiet and allowed me to really focus on playing sled hockey for most of that time.

**Davis**

That's kind of one question I was going to have, hockey being such a physical sport, what kind of a difference there was with osteogenesis imperfecta playing hockey versus just growing up?

**Lipsett**

Yeah, so, it is most people's first question (laughs) when I tell him that my sport of choice was hockey. Growing up the doctors pretty much told me at a young age that I wouldn't get to play any kind of sports because it just was too dangerous to me physically and it wasn't fair to other kids that I'd be playing against to, not necessarily take on the risk, but have to deal with a situation where they did something or knocked me down and I broke something. And so, I never really got to play sports growing up. I think I asked about wheelchair basketball one time and I'm sure being at UTA you've seen that a number of times.

**Davis**

Mhmm.

**Lipsett**

It's a pretty physical game and they fall over in their chairs quite a bit and so any of that would have been pretty much guaranteed broken bones for me when I was growing up. So, I really just didn't press the matter when it came to playing sports. I did things here and there with my brother and my friends in the front yard or played a little street hockey growing up in my wheelchair, but nothing organized. Then

when I finally got introduced to sled hockey, I smartened up a little bit and I didn't ask the doctors if I could play (Davis laughs) and just started playing. And really just kind of took it as I learned the game and realized what I could and couldn't do out there and obviously I wasn't ever going to be the most physical player and I just learned how to play the game in a way that I didn't put myself into compromising situations that would ultimately lead to a higher chance of getting injured or breaking something. And so, as I got better and played the game longer, I just got really good at avoiding those types of situations and kind of turned it into a more of a finesse player and a pure goal scorer as opposed to, like I said, a player that relied on physicality and such.

So, it was really up to me to kind of develop and model my game in a way that protected myself because, you know, in hockey that the opponent doesn't care what your situation is or what you have. They've got one job out there and that's to win games. And so, I couldn't rely on anyone else to take it easy on me or be cautious with me. Sled hockey is a full contact sport so, yeah, I did just really figure out a way to make the most of my personal game and did what I had to do to protect myself and stay off the injured list.

### **Davis**

And that's kind of like a hallmark of skilled players in the NHL also. It's not so much that they can just, to finesse the puck or dangle<sup>1</sup> or score. It's, they know how to avoid contact with other players because I mean, the skill players are the ones that people want to hit.

### **Lipsett**

Right. Yeah, yeah. No, it's definitely one of the characteristics of hockey and doesn't matter what level or type of hockey you're playing. Every player has a different role on the team and each team has people that are kind of relied upon to score goals and set plays up and we've got guys that their job is to go out there and separate the opponent from the puck. And so, it's kind of just figuring out the balance and like I said, learning how to best protect yourself and prevent putting myself in any of those potential dangerous situations.

### **Davis**

Right. How old were you when you first started playing organized sled hockey?

### **Lipsett**

I was, fifteen. Yeah, 2002. It was April or May of 2002 is when I was first introduced to it, right after the Paralympic Games in Salt Lake City where Team USA won Gold in sled hockey. There were three players from Dallas on that team that won Gold. When they got back from Salt Lake, there was a little bit of a push for the sport here in the metroplex and I ran into one of the player's mother-in-law, in the grocery store actually, and she gave me his contact information and then I went out and tried it out the next week. And the rest is history (Lipsett and Davis laugh).

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<sup>1</sup> Slang term which references the proficiency of a hockey player to stick-handle through other players while maintaining control of the puck.

**Davis**

How... I've only seen some images of the sleds that players use. Are those difficult to come by or do they have to be customized to each player?

**Lipsett**

So, as you kind of progress up through the competitive landscape of the sport, it gets more customized and more expensive. There are two main manufacturers of sleds in the US, or in North America. One is in the US, one is in Canada. Each one of them have basic beginner sleds that are essentially pretty adjustable and you kind of order them in a small, medium, large type format and then you can adjust the length and such. As you kind of get more competitive, you can purchase sleds that are a little bit more customized, a little bit more fixed because you kind of figured out how to set it up the way that you like it. And then, the top of the spectrum is a totally customized sled that has zero adjustability and buckets that are custom molded to the players, you know, kind of, legs in lower or upper waist and such are usually done (phone beeps) by a process or something of that nature to really make it as custom and form-fitting as possible.

Kind of just like any other kind of sport, the better the equipment fits to you and reacts to your movements and your body the more dynamic and the more agility you have on the playing field or whatever you're playing on. So, it's the same for sled hockey.

**Davis**

Okay. I noticed on the Southwest Wheelchair Athletic Association's website...because earlier this year they had, I guess, practices for the Dallas Sled Stars at Farmers Branch and they had a post about, if people were having an issue getting gear that there was, I guess, I don't know if they had a program or there was someone that can get in touch of... Is that, do you think that is like a limiting factor for how many people can get involved?

**Lipsett**

No, no, so, you mean access to gear?

**Davis**

Yes. Yes.

**Lipsett**

No. So, I actually help run that program and the whole purpose, or not purpose, but idea, by the way we run things is so that anyone can come out without having to have any prior knowledge of the sport. They don't have to have any kind of equipment. We outfit player's head to toe with every single thing that they need to be able to try the sport out. We've got a number of different sleds and sets of equipment of all different sizes that we've never really ran into anyone that we couldn't outfit to get them on the ice.

And so, yeah, that's one of our main goals is to be able to put anyone on the ice at any time without them having to worry about getting any kind of gear or equipment or being financially responsible for any part of that as they get introduced and kind of, if they stick with it, get more involved in the sport.

### **Davis**

Okay. And, I know that the NHL and I actually only noticed it this year, I don't know if they've done it previous years where they had the You Can Play Project, is that similar, do you guys work alongside that?

### **Lipsett**

So, it's not, it's not the same. The NHL is getting more involved in sled hockey for sure. We actually have a really, really good relationship with the Dallas Stars and the Dallas Stars Foundation. They provide a ton of funding for us every year. But, we aren't, I guess, that program doesn't include us per se. Those are kind of like, not specialized programs, but either you've got, Try Hockey for Free, that the NHL kind of puts on, which is just one weekend every season and then you've got a number of different programs to help get kids involved in to hockey. In Dallas, they're called Little Rookie programs where they kind of provide you with a lot of the gear necessary to try hockey out at a young age for free, but they're very structured programs, so it's like a six week or nine-week program and then it's over.

Our program is kind of set up that way. We, you know, every single weekend, the entire season, every year. So, we're kind of try hockey for free every weekend. So, we always invite anyone out at any time that we've got practices set up to come try it out. And we try to make any kind of accommodations that we can to help make that as easy as possible for as many people as possible.

### **Davis**

Do you guys ever participate with similar programs out of state as well?

### **Lipsett**

Yeah, that's the only way that we really get to compete. So, we travel twice a year to two big tournaments. One of them is put on by the NHL, called the NHL Sled Classic where all the teams have to be affiliated with their local NHL team in some form or fashion. I think last year there were thirty-two teams there and twenty-eight NHL teams represented, and that number grows every year as more NHL clubs kind of focus more on being involved in sled hockey and giving back to the game in a different way. And then, in April every year is the USA Disabled Hockey Festival which is put on by USA Hockey and it includes all of the disciplines of disabled hockey that is governed under USA Hockey. So, it includes sled hockey, special hockey which is cognitive...players with cognitive impairments, deaf hockey, blind hockey,

warrior hockey and standing amputee hockey. So, there's six disciplines that are governed under USA Hockey, Disabled Hockey Section, and the festival brings all disciplines into one location and everyone has their own tournaments within the festival.

This past season there were well over a hundred teams total and over 1,300 players that participated in the festival last month that was held in Chicago this year. It changes location every year, but it continues to grow and just sled hockey alone had over eighty teams represented this year.

**Davis**

Oh, wow and that's, you said that's sponsored by USA Hockey.

**Lipsett**

It's put on by USA Hockey, yeah.

**Davis**

Okay. I know, since you mentioned USA Hockey, you work with USA Hockey, right? Or are a part of?

**Lipsett**

Yeah, I'm on the board of directors as an athlete director and a member of the Disabled Hockey Section as well.

**Davis**

So what kind of responsibilities do you have in that role?

**Lipsett**

As an athlete director, I'm kind of a voice for athletes directly to the board of directors. So, I'm actually on the board of directors as a voting member and really just try to, like I said, provide a voice for the players. So much of sports is governed by other individuals that are a part of the sport, whether it be coaches, refs, administrators, doctors and so the goal is to just not let the player's voice be lost and the decisions that are made at the board of director level to help grow the game at all different levels and not just disabled hockey, but standing hockey, youth hockey, girls hockey, women's hockey and you name it. Basically, all hockey in the United States is governed under USA Hockey and so we've got a tremendous responsibility to do what's best for the game no matter what kind of hockey it is. And so, again, it's just, my goal, my role is to continue to make sure the players have a voice in all the decisions that are made.

And then, on the Disabled Hockey Section, as a member of that committee, it's really just figuring out how to continue to grow disabled hockey in the United States, not just sled hockey, but all disabled hockey and try to make decisions to better the game and the organization of disabled hockey for players and make it more available across the country to people and more cost-effective and just anything and everything involved with disabled hockey. We vote on rules and regulations and we plan and decide where the disabled festival is going to be every year and where the NHL Classic is going to be every year. Really just all hands on deck across the disabled hockey spectrum on trying to continue to grow the game.

**Davis**

You talked earlier about getting interested, when you saw the Paralympic Games in Salt Lake City, in hockey, but you played in the Paralympics as well, right?

**Lipsett**

Right, so I actually didn't see the Paralympic Games in Salt Lake City. Back then it wasn't televised or anything, but I found out about it right after they got back.

**Davis**

Oh, okay.

**Lipsett**

Yeah, but yeah, I have competed in three Paralympic Games.

**Davis**

And it was Sochi, Vancouver and then what was the other one?

**Lipsett**

Torino in 2006.

**Davis**

Oh, okay, so two... And you medaled in each one, right?



**Lipsett**

Right. Yeah. We got Bronze in 2006 and then Gold in Vancouver and Sochi.

**Davis**

Have you, did you notice, is there any difference in the way the sport is treated in those other countries as opposed to here?

**Lipsett**

Oh yeah, most definitely. There's a number of different reasons why. One thing that a lot of countries struggle with is size and population. The US has a huge population, a large number of disabled people to, not choose from, but to expose to, various disabled sports, sled hockey being one of them. We also had been in a war for ten years that provided us with a lot of athletic, young, talented, individuals that were injured overseas that were thrust into the disabled sport scene as part of their rehab and then just part of getting back to normal life. And so, we had a huge explosion of growth in participation just from that in addition to just the sport naturally growing up over time.

A lot of other countries don't have that access to disabled... or don't have that number of disabled individuals to expose to disabled sports or sled hockey. A lot of countries don't spend the time or money on developing various sports. I can't say that they don't have the time or money because they spend a lot of time and money on developing other sports and athletes and other, other sports. So, you can't really say that they don't have the resources to do that, they just don't. You know, because you just think about at the Paralympic level as a governing body is spending a lot of money on a hockey team to train and prepare for competition. At the end of the day that's a lot of resources for one medal and one sport, whereas, if you're spending the same amount of money on seventeen athletes that are in cross country skiing then those resources in a lot of countries' mind are spent better because that's seventeen opportunities to medal, or more because a lot of, say cross-country skiers are in multiple events, up to six. And so, you just increased your likelihood of medaling, which is, that's the goal of any national governing body of Olympic or Paralympic sport is to medal and to produce medalists.

A lot of countries find it hard to justify spending those resources on the pursuit of one medal when they could spend an equal amount of money on the pursuit of, say, if we just stick with the roster size of a sled hockey team, seventeen. Seventeen times six, that's how many medals that, you know, you could win if every athlete was to medal in, say in cross-country skiing and all the different events. So, that's the other issue that I see when you kind of compare countries to the US. And then, some countries just don't have the resources to do it, to spend the time and money to develop athletes.

**Davis**

I watched a few of the games this year, earlier this year and I noticed that the US/Canada game is, was super competitive as opposed to some of the other...

**Lipsett**

(Coughs) Right, yeah, the US and Canada by far the top two teams in the world. Russia was right there as well before they got handed their doping ramifications, I guess you would call it.

**Davis**

Right.

**Lipsett**

And so, they can't, they've been out of the picture since 2016, so hopefully they'll get back on the scene once they clean all that up and continue to be competitive as well. We expect China to come on the scene here pretty quick as they're the host of the next Winter Paralympics and they've already started building their sled hockey program and you know, when you've got countries like Russia and China that are kind of more communist style countries and resources aren't an issue they did tend to, to really develop quickly and do whatever they have to do to get better in a very short amount of time. I've been told that China is ahead of where Russia was at this point before hosting the Paralympic Games. And, Russia, obviously played for a gold medal in sled hockey in Sochi. So, we expect them to come on the scene here pretty quick and in a strong way.

The other countries, like I said, it's just some countries spend more time focusing on other sports, some countries just don't have the funding. They've got, they might have players and such, but they just don't have the funding to develop the game at a grass root level, which is something that both the US and Canada, but specifically the US, the amount of time and resources spent on developing the game at the grass root level is just far and above any other country in the world. You can see that with current national team members having played the game since they were six, seven, eight years old and now they're on the Paralympic teams. So, they've been essentially being...they've been developed for the past ten, fifteen years to ultimately be Paralympians.

**Davis**

And the national team, that's kind of, is that like the pinnacle of the sport?

**Lipsett**

Without a doubt, yeah.

**Davis**

Is there...outside of the Paralympics, are there ever opportunities for International Exhibition Games?

**Lipsett**

Yeah, so the national team has a season every single year and they play a number of tournaments every single season, including world championships. Three out of the four or three out of the four years in between, or I guess it would be two, two world championships in between Paralympics.

**Davis**

Okay.

**Lipsett**

So, the international scene is constantly very active and always competitions going on around the world.

**Davis**

How...to make the national team, how competitive is that?

**Lipsett**

It's extremely competitive and continues to be...to get more competitive every single year. When I first started, my introduction to the national team was they had just got done with the tournament and a couple of guys got hurt and were out for the season and the coach literally put a hat in the middle of the table and asked players to write down the names of anyone who they thought might be able to play on the team. And luckily, one of the guys from here in Dallas put my name in the hat and it got pulled out and I got a phone call to come to the next training camp in January 2004. And that was it. I mean that was my, the start of my career. I didn't try out, it was literally just picked out of a hat because there was no one else that was even close to being ready. And then, even for a number of years, the beginning of my career, the tryouts, there might have been twenty-five people trying out, five had no business being there and they were there just for the experience. Another five weren't quite ready yet and then they picked fifteen. So, pretty much everyone knew what the team was going to be before tryouts even started.

This past year at the Paralympic Games, there were over seventy players that tried out and (coughs) they easily could have picked two full national teams that could have competed for medals at the Paralympic Games, without a doubt. To have that kind of competition at a try out just, again, speaks to the development of the sport in the US, the amount of resources spent on building the sport at the grass root level and the players that it's producing are just better than anything the world has ever seen.

I mean, if you watched any of those games, Declan Farmer and Brody Roybal are the two best sled hockey athletes to ever play the game, and that's not just me saying that, that's people from other countries that I've talked to saying that. I even played against a lot of guys that were considered the best in the sport up to that point and those guys would have never stood a chance against players like Brody and Declan.

So, it's just so competitive. I tried out for the team in 2018, well it was the summer of 2017 but, for the Paralympic team and I didn't make it and I was arguably in the best shape of my life, in better shape than I'd ever been in my whole entire ten-year career. Had a phenomenal try out, scored multiple goals in the games that are played, where the staff analyzes players and picks the team and it wasn't enough to make it because just so many good players out there. It's really remarkable at how talented all the players are now.

## **Davis**

Wow. So, with osteogenesis imperfecta, how do you prepare to compete at that level? Is there, I mean, are there concerns for just being able to stay fit or what kind of workouts you can do?

## **Lipsett**

No, not really. Obviously, a lot of it is just off-ice training. I did a lot of like high intensity type workouts, CrossFit type workouts, anything that would kind of build endurance while building strength. As a hockey player it's not necessarily important to be able to bench 350 pounds, but you got to be able to work hard and compete for an entire period of hockey before you really get a break. So, a lot of workouts are structured around going as hard as you can for two minutes and then taking a little break and then going hard again for another two minutes, really trying to simulate, playing a shift during a period of hockey and kind of just putting it all together, the strength, the speed, the explosiveness to ultimately translate to being a better player on the ice.

And then, obviously, on-ice training is always important. Just working on refining those skills that you've developed over the years and that are needed to excel in the sport. The passing, the shooting, again, the speed and agility on the ice and probably one of the main things, the ability to use both hands to both pass and shoot.

## **Davis**

I know in previous interviews you talked about the support system you had from when you started to play up until you're competing in the Paralympics. Do you mind talking about that a little bit?

## **Lipsett**

Yeah, of course (coughs). No Olympian or Paralympian gets to where they're at, at the top of their sport without a huge support system and people that make endless sacrifices to help them get, to get there... Mine started out with, obviously, my parents.

So, I was a teenager and as I started really getting better and realized that I had a future, my dad would take me to practices with the adults on Friday nights from 11:00 PM to 1:00 AM. Then, it was about an hour away from where we lived, and we'd get home about 2:00 AM, 2:30 AM and he was up at 6:00 AM on Saturday morning to go to work, to work his second job to help just fund everything and make sure that we had the ability to pursue the things that we wanted to pursue. And then, on Saturday, my mom would take me back to hockey practice with the youth team, because at the time I played on both the

youth and adult teams here in Dallas to, again, continue to develop as a player. I don't think we missed a Saturday for probably the first four or five years (Davis laughs). And so, you know, just the time and effort that they had to put forth and things that they had to sacrifice to make sure that I got to train as much as possible... They spent money on gym memberships to make sure that I could start training off the ice at the level I needed to, and it obviously started there and then as I got older and started dating and got into a serious relationship... The time that's sacrificed away from just loved-one's overall.

But, my wife now, I was traveling at least once a month from the day that we met through last year really. It takes a lot of understanding and people have to pick up the slack at home when you're gone, especially when we had a baby to allow you, to not just travel, to train and compete, but to allow you to train at home. There were days where I would get up at 4:30, 5:00 in the morning to go work out before work, I would go to work, I would come home, eat, and then go back to the gym or to the rink to work out again or skate again and she was pretty much stuck at home with the baby to make sure that the baby was taken care of and fed and bathed and put to bed. To have people in your life that understand the ultimate goal and are willing to do whatever it takes to help you continue to focus on what you're trying to achieve, and the goals you're trying to reach is extremely important and it would really be impossible without those people in your life. Mine even carried over into my professional career as an investment professional and my company and my boss being willing to let me work shorter hours so that I can train before and after work and take time off to travel, to train and compete.

A lot of employers wouldn't do that, wouldn't be understanding of the time commitment that it takes, but fortunately I've worked for the same company my entire professional career and they've always been unbelievable, from the very top of the company down to my manager and people that support me when I'm out of the office. I definitely have had lots of people in my life and around me that have allowed me to reach the pinnacle of the sport and accomplish the things that I've been able to accomplish.

**Davis**

So, you have a toddler now and one on the way, is that right?

**Lipsett**

Right. Yeah, we have a three-year-old daughter and a daughter that is due in October.

**Davis**

Okay. Are there any special challenges with little ones running around the house, for you?

**Lipsett**

I wouldn't necessarily call it, call anything special. I think one thing that kind of, not separates me from say someone that's paralyzed, is having the ability and the use of your legs is like, a game changer in any form or fashion. Being in a wheelchair and being totally paralyzed there's just so many things that you have to adapt just to handle daily life. But, since I do have full function and full use of my legs, if I need to stay up I just stand up or if I need to walk a short distance to pick something up or stop stuff...my

daughter from doing something, I can do that. So, for me personally, I don't really have anything special that I have to do or adapt to, to be able to be a parent. But again, that's very different depending on people's level of disabilities and what their specific circumstances might be.

**Davis**

<topic>Accessibility</topic>

Right. Have you ever had issues with accessibility? I only, I'm only familiar with the StarCenter in Farmers Branch. Anywhere that you've played or even in college, have you ever had any issues with that?

**Lipsett**

Not really in college. We've definitely played at places that were not wheelchair friendly or not sled hockey friendly, that the only way to get onto and off the ice are huge steps to get from the bench area out onto the ice or that sort of thing. So, for us here in Dallas to have a rink like Farmers Branch where they spent the money and took the time to really make our practice rink sled accessible, so players could just go on and off the ice at ice level. And, if we do have games set up there, they're able to remove the rubber padding and there's synthetic ice underneath that, so it allows us to skate on and off the ice in a pretty efficient and quick manner to allow the game to keep the speed up. So, we're really lucky there's not a ton of rinks in the United States that are sled accessible. So, we definitely owe it to the Stars and the Dr. Pepper StarCenter for giving us that opportunity to have a rink that is accessible because I definitely played at places where it wasn't.

**Davis**

So, we...earlier we talked about the SWAA and the program that you run through that. Are there any others that you'd like to talk about, just to make people aware?

**Lipsett**

Here in Dallas, or...

**Davis**

Yeah, it could be in Dallas or just any that you know of in general.

**Lipsett**

So, we're the only sled hockey program in Dallas. So, anything sled hockey related it obviously comes to us. There are also sled hockey programs in Austin, Houston and San Antonio. So, we've got four teams going in Dallas. San Antonio is pretty well established, we're pretty well established and Austin and Houston or are trying to grow and kind of become more competitive. But, to be honest, anybody that

lives anywhere close to a big city in the United States, there's a good chance that there is a sled hockey program close. If anyone is ever interested no matter where they're at, definitely worth just doing a quick Google search and then, if not that, all the teams and programs around the country are listed on USA Hockey's website as well.

In addition to sled hockey here in Dallas, we're really focusing on trying to expand to all the other areas of disabled hockey. So, we recently started a warrior program which is a stand-up team that is comprised of military veterans that have a ten percent or greater disability rating from the VA. So, we've got two teams, two different levels of skill that are competing in warrior hockey now and we're working on starting a special hockey program, which again, is for people with cognitive disabilities from down syndrome to autism, anything in that area. We've got a meeting with the Stars here coming up to discuss blind hockey.

That's the newest discipline of disabled hockey under USA Hockey's umbrella, so, there's a big push for the bigger hockey markets in the United States to really explore that new discipline and at the very least host Try Blind Hockey days for individuals in the blind community from around the metroplex. So, that's something that's on our radar and hopefully we'll at least be able to have one kind of event here in the near future for blind hockey as well.

## **Davis**

What advice would you give to people that are trying to get into adapted sports or sled hockey, but just any adapted sport really?

## **Lipsett**

So, as far as just getting involved in adapted sports, my recommendation is always to try everything. I don't like talking bad about (Lipsett and Davis laugh) any other sports, but there are some sports that, I'm not going to lie, they're a little bit greedy with their participants and they don't want their participants to try anything else because they want them to be kind of ready and available at any time for their specific needs in that sport, which I get. But, when you're trying to develop a young person, disabled or not, the goal is to really just play everything, try everything out. So, I would just definitely recommend parents and kids to try anything and everything that you can get your hands on. There's a number of events around DFW on a yearly basis that really introduces people to various disabled sports, so we're doing a good job of trying to expose people to as many adapted sports as we can.

As far as sled hockey specific, my recommendation, or not my recommendation, but my kind of ask of people that try it is don't give up easy, because my opinion it's one of the hardest adapted sports because we take you out of your wheelchair, we take you off your prosthetics, we're putting you in a contraption that you're not used to. You're using muscles to balance on two blades that you're not used to using because in a chair, you don't really have to be stable, your wheels kind of stabilize you for yourself and you're using both hands to push yourself, to propel yourself on the ice, and then, you're using both hands to pass and shoot and there's just so much going on in such a dynamic sport physically that it's not easy and no one picks it up right away their first or second or third or fourth, fifth time out on the ice. It takes a solid six months to a year just to really start getting the hang of things. So, we always encourage people to just stick with it.

If it's something that you enjoy doing or that you want to really get better at it, just give yourself time and stick with it because it's a lot of fun. The hockey community is a tight knit community and we do

whatever we can to support each other and to support our players and, for our program specifically, we do a lot of work in the off season to raise funds to be able to, again, provide people with the opportunity to play sled hockey free of charge. Whether that means gear, ice time, but if you play with us competitively, we also cover your flights and hotels to any tournaments that we do travel to. So, we really want to just make this all about having fun and getting people on the ice and did not have to worry about anything else. We're always looking for more people to try it out.

**Davis**

Well that's always good. I mean, it's supposed to be fun, you're playing a game.

**Lipsett**

Right.

**Davis**

Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about that we haven't covered (phone beeps)?

**Lipsett**

I guess, just the last thing would be, just in regard to the Paralympic movement overall, we've seen such a change in, not necessarily accessibility to adapted sports, (phone beeps) but the support of adapted sports, from corporations, from sponsors across the board. Like I said, in 2002 I had no idea what the Paralympics were. I didn't see the Paralympics on TV and now just this past Paralympic Games NBC had a record number of hours of live content of Paralympics on TV every single day during the games, and they had (phone beeps) live streams of every single sport on their app and online.

So, it's just, it's really important for people to continue to put the time and resources, even like you're doing, doing an oral history of the Paralympics and the Paralympic movement, educating people about the Paralympics and about adapted sports. The more people that know about it, the more people that support it, the more companies and networks will continue to invest the time and money into showing it to the world. And so, continue to do that work to be that person that educates people on the Paralympic movement and continue to support it and watch it grow because it's grown tremendously since I got involved in adapted sports and it's been really awesome to see the opportunities that players have, again, not just at the grass root level, but at the Paralympic level.

People being able to make a living off playing Paralympic sports is something that was unheard of when I first started and now there's a number of athletes that do it for a living full time, and a number of companies that support athletes in the Paralympic space, and kids can go to college for free on scholarships playing Paralympic sports, now. It's just really cool to see.

**Davis**



One final question, and it's just more a hockey fan question. Who's your favorite hockey player?

**Lipsett**

(Coughs) Oh man, good question. Currently I've got to say Tyler Seguin, not just because I like the style of game that he plays, especially this last season, he was just a really good player all 200 feet on the ice. He played great defensively, he obviously played great offensively, but he also, he's a big supporter of disabled hockey and ever since he's been here in Dallas he's always been involved in some form or fashion with our program. He's been out on sleds with us a number of times playing exhibition games for charity fundraising events that we've hosted. He's just been a big supporter of us and of disabled hockey in general. When you couple that along with just his play on the ice and just the presence that he has here in Dallas and kind of the way he's affected hockey here in the Dallas area. It's been fun to see people get excited about the Stars again and hopefully they can put a couple more pieces together and make a playoff push here pretty soon.

**Davis**

Yeah, I hope the same thing. Definitely, somebody with a Seguin's notoriety, it's got to help the sport, not just ice hockey, but sled hockey and then the warrior hockey program and everything else as well.

**Lipsett**

Yeah, without a doubt. It has impact far beyond just the NHL team for sure.

**Davis**

Well, is there anything else you'd like to discuss?

**Lipsett**

I think I'm good, if you're good.

**Davis**

All right. Well, I guess we'll go ahead and call it. Mr. Lipsett, I really appreciate you participating in the interview.

**Lipsett**

Yeah, of course. Thanks for reaching out.

**Davis**

Not a problem (feedback from phone).

**Lipsett**

Go ahead.

**Davis**

Do you mind hanging out on the phone for just a second? I'll talk to you a little bit after we stop recording.

**Lipsett**

Okay.

**Davis**

Alright.

**Lipsett**

Sure, no worries.

**Davis**

Thank you.

*End of interview*