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Another tournament, another trophy for AFTAC Hockey

By Susan A. Romano, AFTAC Public Affairs

PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – The Athletes for Teamwork and Charity Hockey Club took home its second trophy of the year during the Tampa Invitational Tournament held at the Florida Hospital Center Ice facility in Wesley Chapel, Fla., Dec. 1, 2018.

The team co-hosted the charity tournament to raise money for Lighting Made Sled Hockey, a program sponsored by the Tampa Bay Lightning hockey team that provides people with disabilities the ability to play the game they love. Players sit in specially designed sleds that sit atop two skate blades. Competitors use two sticks with metal picks on one end to propel themselves across the ice and stick blades on the other to pass and shoot the puck.



In early 2018, the Northeast Indiana Warbirds from Fort Wayne, Ind., approached AFTAC Hockey about possible games in Florida. From there, AFTAC contacted the Tampa Warriors, affiliated with the USA Warriors program, about scheduling head-to-head match-ups at the new Florida Hospital Rink in Wesley Chapel, with all proceeds going to the sled hockey league.

Bill Hungate, captain of AFTAC's club, was thrilled when he was approached to co-host the tournament.

"Our team has traveled to compete against national-level competition like the U.S. Naval Academy, The Citadel, and the FBI's D.C., just to name a few," Hungate explained. "But when you're responsible for bringing in a team from out of state, there are a lot more logistical aspects to consider. It was great to skate against the Warbirds and the Warriors."

The first match pitted the Warriors against the Warbirds. It was end-to-end action with the Warriors holding a 6-4 advantage until early into the third period when Warbird ace Lawne Snyder, a former minor league professional player and current Tampa resident, uncorked a wicked slap shot that whizzed just above the goalie's glove and shattered the plexiglass behind the net. The remainder of the game was cancelled so repairs could be made.

The next match-up saw the Warbirds going head-to-head against AFTAC. "This game was a shootout!" exclaimed AFTAC forward Cam Maddox. "High scoring, lots of shots on goal and super energy from both teams. It makes for great hockey."

AFTAC won the game, 15-7.

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2-2-2 HOCKEY

The final game of the tournament was between AFTAC and the talented Warriors team. Some Warbird players asked to join the AFTAC roster as players and coaches because they were having so much fun. The score was knotted in the third period until AFTAC's captain tallied the game-winning goal with less than a minute to go, giving AFTAC the win and the Warbirds players a taste of victory in Florida.

"Our charity matches are what we call 'no-contact games,' meaning we don't hit and check and tolerate fights like you might see in an NHL game," Hungate explained.

"During our last match, there was a lot of incidental contact that came in the spirit of good competition. But one of the great things about hockey is that no matter what happens on the ice, there is always a post-game handshake at center ice. Overall, I think it was an incredibly successful tournament, and many of the Warbird players said they're already planning personal vacations to come back to Florida and connect with our players. Between making new friends and raising money for a great cause, it really doesn't get much better than that."

The tournament raised more than \$1,000.

This was the second championship trophy AFTAC won in 2018; the first was against the Tampa Bay Fire Fighters in September.

AFTAC kicks off its collegiate portion of their schedule, with their next game is scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 19 at the Space Coast Iceplex in Rockledge, Fla., where they'll be lacing up to play Eastern Florida State College Titans for the first time. Proceeds will go to EFSC's scholarship program and Space Coast Blast Sled Hockey.

After EFSC, the team hits the road for a game against the Lynn University Fighting Knights in Boca Raton Feb. 2, then onto South Beach for a game versus the Hurricanes at the University of Miami Feb. 23.

For the team's full schedule, to donate, or to obtain tickets for the game, visit the AFTAC Hockey Facebook page or send an email to AFTACHockey@gmail.com.