



Jack Cunningham



Max Malec



Lee Asher



Max Rohn



Lucas Resch



Ester Faith Henn



Angel Guzman

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.



Rohan Murphy, Penn State Wrestling, South Korea Paralympics

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

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We Are... Inclusive. Competitive. United.



Maggie Redden, Beijing Paralympics



Kortney Clemons, Team USA



Brandon Lyons, Paris Paralympics



Jeff Hantz, Athens Paralympics



Mike McHugh, '09 Freshman Year



Michele Wheeler, Team USA



Shawn Morelli, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Paris Paralympics



Jake Schrom, Tokyo Paralympics



Rohan Murphy, Penn State Wrestling



RJ Shirey, US Para National Champion



Kortney Clemons, Team USA

THE RISE ABOVE

CASE FOR SUPPORT

Rise Above Ability

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