

Baxter School for Deaf basketball team back in the game

pressherald.com/2023/01/17/baxter-school-for-deaf-basketball-team-back-in-the-game/

By Sydney Richelieu

January 17, 2023



Hunter Deane, 13, brings the ball down the court for the Baxter Seagulls. *Sydney Richelieu / The Forecaster*

After a seven year timeout, the Baxter Seagulls are back on the basketball court.

The coed middle school team at the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Governor Baxter School for the Deaf played their season opener against a Boston team last week on Mackworth Island in Falmouth. The school has had dwindling enrollment numbers over the past decade that made it impossible to field a team, but this year it has 10 players.

Bringing back the team is about more than just giving the kids the opportunity to play basketball again, however. It's about providing them a way to connect with deaf and hard of hearing peers, teachers, alumni and community members, says Karen Hopkins, MECDHH/GBSD's executive director.

"When you're out in the hearing world, these deaf children struggle to have access," Hopkins said. "Having the access be totally accessible to them here, they just relax, and they're having fun, and they're connected with the culture and the community."

The years without a basketball team were hard on the deaf and hard of hearing community, she said.

"It's been a real loss for the community to not have it, because we didn't really have anything that brought everyone together," she said.

Samantha Hebert, the mother of 14-year-old team member Chyanne Morey, is thrilled that her daughter has the experience of playing sports with other deaf students.

“It’s great to have the interaction,” Hebert said. “For her, just to feel like it’s all inclusive and to be with peers and fully communicate, it’s a great feeling.”

Team member Hunter Deane, 13, said he likes playing with other deaf student athletes.

“It feels different to play with deaf students,” Deane said. “I feel good about it.”

The gym on Mackworth Island was filled with supporters at the Jan. 10 game against the victorious Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Boston. Alumni were among those cheering on the Seagulls. Richard Morlock, who graduated in 1977, attended with two friends who are also alumni.

“To see the team go away was really sad, so we’re super excited to have these kids be able to play,” Morlock said. “We really want to support them. It’s great energy.”

Matthew Welch, who coaches the Seagulls with Jennifer Hickey, said the team was nervous but excited before the game.

“It’s a great feeling to have the students back, particularly these young students, who are all very new to the game,” Welch said. “They are working so hard and they’re really excited.”

The school has about 750 students statewide. The students are enrolled in mainstream schools and attend site-based programs run by MECDHH/GBSD. About 60 K-12 students attend Portland area schools.

Being on Mackworth Island for games and other events is special for them, Hopkins said.

“They love coming back to the island,” Hopkins said. “They come here for summer school, and for extended school year programming, and their faces just light up every time they come back.”

MECDHH/GBSD is hoping to offer more community-wide events in the future, possibly a drama club and a winter island getaway in February.

“Just getting families and students together as much as we can is important,” Hopkins said.



The Baxter Seagulls play against Horace Mann School for the Deaf Jan. 10 on Mackworth Island. *Sydney Richelieu / The Forecaster*

The next Baxter Seagulls home game is versus GBSD alumni on Feb. 16 at 4 pm.

Comments are not available on this story.

[« Previous](#)

[Winter Guide: Outdoor skating rinks ready when weather is](#)

© 2023