

Breaking the ICE

Despite dedicated players, the Wando hockey team remains in the shadows

By Sophie Winnick

Michael Victurine rushes down the rink in his skates. He maneuvers around one blocker and turns on the speed. He approaches the goalie. He visualizes a gap in the defense—an opportunity. He shoots, he scores. He waits for the roar of approval from the crowd.

Silence.

Even though the entire team is full of dedicated athletes, this hockey team is in a region where football reigns as king. The hockey team is not recognized as a sport or a club at Wando, and therefore does not receive funding. Many at Wando do not know about the hockey team, and this leaves the team with a disappointing crowd.

“Our jerseys and uniforms are definitely not as put together as some of the teams we play against. It’s harder for us to get into tournaments and getting out there and playing more games. We pay for our uniforms and ice time and practices on top

of everything else... The cost of a season for each player is around \$300,” Michael Victurine said on some of the disadvantages of not playing for a team funded by the high school’s athletic department.

Many of Wando’s sports teams have hundreds of students and parents show up for support. Victurine said the hockey team is lucky to get four Wando students to show up—on a good night. Hockey is definitely not as big as football in the South. Victurine thinks this has something to do with hockey not being funded by high schools in a Southern state.

“I feel like football and sports like lacrosse are looked at more because of the area that we’re in. If we’re up North, like in Montana, high school hockey is even bigger than travel hockey. It’s the football for the North.”

The demand is definitely there for the sport at Wando. Braxton Rickenbaker said that there were almost 30 kids on the team last year, and this year, another large number. They are out there winning tournaments.

“We still have a solid team. You know, we’re loyal to the team. When we go in, we practice hard. You know, we don’t really like paying our own fees, but we do it because we love the sport,” Rickenbaker said.

Another disadvantage for a team virtually not even affiliated with their high school is that the players have a harder time getting noticed by colleges.

“You really kinda have to go personally out of your way to talk to college coaches... They don’t really look, you know, especially down here in the South. They look in places like Boston, or other big Northern cities,” Rickenbaker said.

One of the biggest challenges for hockey becoming a school-sponsored sport is Title IX. If Wando were to add a male sport to their athletic department, they would also have to add a female sport for gender equality—which means the athletic department would have to fund two additional sports.

The players said they just want recognition. The hockey team wants to be on Wando’s announcements when they win, they said.

“You know, like in the yearbook, we have to buy our own ad, pay for a full page, which we don’t mind doing, but we’d like to be included. We’d like to be on the announcements if we win. We’re having a pretty good season this year, and we don’t get recognized for it... Half the school doesn’t even know we have a hockey team,” Rickenbaker said.

