



Team USA celebrates with the National Anthem. Photo courtesy of Luca Renoldi

# Featured Athlete

## Taylor Chace: Dreaming Big and Shooting for the Stars

Our featured athlete is Taylor Chace, lifelong resident of Hampton Falls and Paralympics medalist in sled hockey. Earlier this year, Chace brought home gold when the USA defeated Russia 1-0 in Sochi.

This was actually the third medal won by Taylor in the sport of sled hockey. The first was a bronze medal in the 2006 Torino, Italy Paralympics, and the second was a gold medal in the 2010 Vancouver, British Columbia Paralympics. In the 2010 games, he was also recognized as Top Defenseman, and he later was named Athlete of the Month by the USOC in December of 2012.

On October 6, 2002, at the age of 16, Taylor was playing hockey in a preseason charity hockey game in Canada. Taylor got checked into the dasher behind the net and he collapsed, unable to feel or move from the waist down. He suffered an incomplete spinal cord injury. After hours of surgery, weeks of hospitalization, and months of rehabilitation, he relearned to walk using his remaining muscle groups. His world had changed forever and the thought of never playing a competitive sport again was devastating.

In the winter of 2003, Taylor was introduced to the sport of sled hockey at Northeast Passage at the University of New Hampshire. Northeast Passage is a youth development program that helps those with physical impairments. *“It starts out as therapy and enables participants to find confidence in themselves*



Taylor Chace throwing out the first pitch at Fenway Park on May 1, 2014.

*and to be competitive with a group that shares similar experiences,”* Taylor explains.

Taylor found that this sport was a challenge but he continued to improve. In 2005, he was invited to try out for the United State Sled Hockey Team in Colorado. He missed his high school graduation to attend the try-out, and he made the USA Team.

Taylor has an inspirational story of overcoming adversity, one that he shares when speaking to groups promoting awareness of recreation and competitive opportunities for youth and adult athletes with disabilities.

When asked what main points he makes in his speaking engagements, he explained that he dares them to *“dream big and shoot for the stars.”* He also encourages kids to not just find out what they love to do, but to also work hard at it and make it a meaningful part of their lives.

*“Do what you love, but make sure you are respecting it. Talent will only take you so far. If you don’t work hard and remind yourself why you do it, it’s not worth anything in the end.”*

*“I’m so glad I’ve been able to share my story with so many people. Overcoming challenges and the road to overcome them reminds you of all the*



Photo courtesy of Luca Renoldi

*work along the way, the people who helped you,”* he says. *“You can’t do anything alone in life. You need to have people to lean on when you need help. Those are lessons from my parents that I carry with me.”*

On May 1, Taylor had the honor of throwing out the first pitch at the Red Sox game at Fenway Park. The Red Sox invited Taylor and other New Hampshire members of Team USA to the pre-game ceremony celebrating their accomplishments.

*“It was an awesome experience to attend with my parents and girlfriend and other NH Team USA members as well, and to represent Hampton Falls and the great state of New Hampshire,”* Taylor says. *“It was very meaningful to share that with New England and beyond.”*

Taylor feels lucky to have grown up in the unique, small town environment of Hampton Falls. *“Everybody is supportive and there’s a friendly, neighborhood atmosphere. It reflects their values of working together as a group and accomplishing tasks for the good of the town. The school system is amazing. It’s one of those communities that try to make the state of New Hampshire a better place.”*

One of Taylor’s greatest memories from childhood in the town is going outside to play with his friends. *“The street I grew up on was a dead end street, and there were many kids about the same age. We played outside until we were called in to dinner. Hampton Falls is a town that has a lot of opportunity to be outside and active. There’s so much land that’s accommodating for kids to be outside and safe.”*

What’s next for Taylor? He’s started a new adventure working with the Portland Pirates of the American Hockey League as Director of Public and Community Relations. He also continues as head coach for Adult Sled Hockey at Northeast Passage/ UNH, where he started his sled hockey career back in 2003.

*“I would never change the path my life has taken,”* Taylor reflects. *“Not for a gazillion dollars.”*



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