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STICK IT TO CANCER TOURNAMENT "PLAYS FOR EIGHT"

By Heather Rule, 03/03/17, 11:30AM MST

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Minnesota fundraiser tournament started as a benefit for a local hockey family

The Stick it to Cancer hockey tournament has a little slogan: Play for your eight.

"Because one out of eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer," said Pete Carlson, director of operations and programming at the Schwan Super Rink in Blaine, Minnesota. "So that means that two players in your locker room, the odds are that they're going to get this."

The annual Stick it to Cancer tournament coming up April 7-9 at the Schwan Super Rink is an event where girls and women get together to play hockey and raise money for cancer research, specifically breast cancer. The event started in 2004 when Jody Anderson, a youth hockey mom from nearby Centennial High School, was

diagnosed with breast cancer.

Some women put together a hockey tournament to raise money for the Anderson family. After Anderson died, the group kept the tournament going with the help of the folks at the Super Rink in 2008.

"We said, 'Well, let's make this bigger and better and try to raise some money with this thing,'" Carlson said. "That's when it kind of became a little bit larger scale."

The tournament has raised about \$750,000 for various organizations supporting cancer research, including the Susan G. Komen Foundation. The past few years, funds have benefitted the University of Minnesota Masonic Cancer Center. Last year, the tournament raised \$37,200. The most money raised at one tournament: \$98,000. They'd like to hit the \$1 million mark within the next couple years.

Stick it to Cancer is primarily a fundraiser first, according to Carlson, but it's also about the cause, and "it's a very emotional weekend."

The days are filled with reflection on how cancer has affected those around them. Maybe it's that a teammate isn't there this year because of a cancer diagnosis.

"You go upstairs in the Super Rink and people are sitting around and laughing and crying and telling stories and everything else," Carlson said.

First-year tournament director Kristi King started out playing in the tournament. She was hired at the rink in October and "just wanted to jump right in with two feet" when asked about being the Stick it to Cancer director this year. Her aunt died from breast cancer, so it hits close to home.

King mentioned thinking of a high school or college team. Maybe two people in those locker rooms will develop breast cancer at some point in their lives.

"Once you kind of think of things that way and change your perspective," King said. "It's something that you just want to be a part of."

That's quite the atmosphere in itself with all the emotions flowing, but folks aren't just walking into a normal hockey arena that weekend. Balloons and ribbons adorn the venue. Pink plastic paper covers the walls and glass on the outside of the rink.

"We call it, 'Pink the rink,'" Carlson said.

A 12-foot tall hockey player made out of balloons is a spot for a photo-op, too. People can buy pieces of paper for \$1 and write who they're playing for at the tournament. The papers get taped up around the hallways and windows. They even painted the ice pink one year.

The girls' teams range from 10U to 16U, along with lots of women's teams as well. The tournament is bracketed with a three-game guarantee. In the most successful years in terms of turnout, they've had up to 50 youth teams and 50 adult teams, Carlson said. All the tournament divisions are named after cancer survivors or those who have died from the disease; names can be submitted to the tournament organizers.

There's a Jody Anderson division each year, since the tournament started because of her diagnosis.

Teams raise the money on their own for the tournament whether that's through pizza sales, bake sales, car washes or other things.

There are a few changes for this year's tournament. It's the first year they'll hand out trophies and the first year it will be a sanctioned tournament for adults, in an effort to try and get more teams to participate, according to Carlson. Many teams come from around the Twin Cities area, though others venture in from Wisconsin, the Dakotas and Colorado.

The application deadline for teams is March 20 or until the brackets are full. Volunteers also help make the weekend happen, including about 50 timekeepers and 50 volunteer referees.

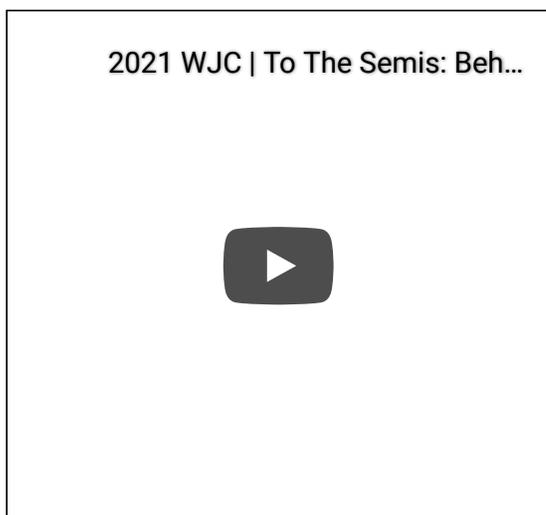
"The more teams, the more money you raise," Carlson said.

They're also going to have an opening ceremony for the first time this year. They'll announce all the teams and where they're from as they parade into the National Sports Center. There will be a social event afterward, with a chance for people to share their stories about themselves or loved ones with cancer.

"People set everything aside for those three days ... just to try and make a difference," King said.

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