

SCORE.

Alone on the bench, the goalie pops his right thigh out of a prosthetic leg. Then, after a deep breath, he removes his left artificial leg. Now, he's ready to play the game he loves—ice hockey.

The goalie is one of the more than 200 players competing for November's USA Hockey Sled Classic championship at the CONSOL Energy Center, home of the tournament host, the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Nearly all the players have limited or no control of their legs. Some were born with spina bifida. Others suffered spinal cord injuries. Many of the vets in the tournament lost limbs in combat. And, well, these guys know how to *move*.

Players propel themselves forward with short hockey sticks (each with a pointed end for pushing) while strapped into hard plastic seats perched on tiny metal frames with twin skate blades. They blaze across the ice at up to 30 miles per hour.

Lee Tempest is a data coordinator at the University of Pittsburgh Model Center on Spinal Cord Injury. The 40-year-old started playing when he was 18, after a car wreck injured his spinal cord. "After years of playing, I feel I can do so much more in all aspects of my life."

Although his Mighty Penguins, sponsored in part by the UPMC Rehabilitation Institute, missed the trophy round, Tempest and his 19-year-old teammate, Pitt sophomore Dan McCoy, understand that the real victories don't show up in the final score. "The game's made me who I am now," says McCoy, watching from the stands. It's given me the confidence to . . . let people know that who I am is not about spina bifida."

McCoy focuses on the action on the rink below. A player unleashes a blistering shot. The puck slips past a goalie's outstretched arm. McCoy smiles. It's a winner. *—Photo and Text by John Altdorfer*

Note: *Dan McCoy went on to play for the U.S. Men's Team during the 2014 Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi; the team took the Gold.*