



New Year, Continued Emphasis on Education, and Resources to Connect Sidelined Athletes with Teams Across the State

Atlanta, February 28, 2024 – This year marks the 34th anniversary of the passing of the *Americans with Disabilities Act* and the 11th anniversary of the *Dear Colleague Letter*, issued by the Civil Rights Division of the US Department of Education. The Letter clarified for our schools, their role and responsibility to include students with disabilities in sports programs at school. The Letter simultaneously noted, however, that resources including funding, training, and successful models were needed for schools to be able to step up to meet these needs.

The 2013 Letter made national news, and as its implications were explored, one organization was consistently pointed to as a potential answer because it was already addressing every challenge - the Atlanta-based, **American Association of Adapted Sports Programs (AAASP)**.

As one of the two legacies born of the Atlanta Paralympic Games, AAASP– is the nation’s first (and only) **education-based** interscholastic athletic association - envisioned and established as a membership of schools, school districts and state high school associations, joining together to provide a standardized approach to adapted sports programs for students with physical disabilities at school. Even as these important milestones are marked, too many educators and the general public remain completely unaware of advances in this work or this significantly innovative and unique organization. Nor are they taking advantage of the resources made available to them in serving their students with physical disabilities. To help address these challenges **AdaptED Sports has taken strides over the past 12 months to ensure continued opportunities for students with physical disabilities to have this important opportunity to compete in interscholastic sports:**

First, we have added **three new teams to our AdaptED Sports League across the state** – the Peach County Rolling Trojans (Macon area), the Georgia Storm (Henry County area), and the Classic City Dawgs (Athens area).

Second, we have developed an **area on our website called “Find Your Team”** to make it easier for families to find a program to join and compete through their schools. Visit: [Find Your Team - American Association of Adapted Sports Programs®](#)

Third, we have **continued to work with the National Federation of High Schools to offer a “Coaching AdaptED Sports” certification course free of charge**, developed by the American Association of AdaptED Sports Programs to certify coaches to run a program*. Over **21,300 people** have now taken the course through the NFHS since its launch in 2019. Visit: [Coaching AdaptED Sports Course \(nfhslearn.com\)](#) (*AAASP suggests the certification course, and in-person training as first two steps to coaching a program.)

Fourth to help increase awareness about education-based, adapted interscholastic sports, we have emphasized the “ED” in adaptED with an updated logo.

"Having been involved with AdaptED Sports for many years as a superintendent and now as the GHSA Executive Director and AdaptED Sports Board of Directors, I have seen first-hand the opportunities provided for our student athletes and the difference it makes," said Dr. Robin Hines, Executive Director, Georgia High School Association. "The purpose of scholastic-based sports and activities is to extend learning from the classroom to the fields, courts and stages. There is no better place to learn lifelong skills, and if this is what we want for our students, we should provide these opportunities for all students!"

“AAASP was founded solely for the purpose of extending interscholastic sport opportunities to students with physical disabilities, so that they were no longer sidelined at school,” said Tommie Storms, Cofounder and Executive Director of AAASP. “We’ve done this by adapting rules, policies, procedures and guidelines for governance and administration, while also developing comprehensive coaches and officials training programs. This has resulted in a sustainable infrastructure that encompasses AAASP and our education-based members and partners. This is an important distinction that is often omitted or overlooked. So, it made sense to emphasize the” ED” in adaptED with an updated logo introduced this year, to highlight again that EDUCATION is at the center of our program and partnership goals.” We are proud to introduce three school-based teams to the league this year (listed above), thanks to our partners at the Georgia Department of Education, as we grow opportunities for students across the state to participate.”



The American Association of AdaptED Sports Programs (AAASP or AdaptED Sports) just celebrated its 28th year in Georgia as the infrastructure (similar to the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) or NCAA,) that makes it possible for school systems and school co-ops to implement and sustain programs in adapted athletics, health and fitness in a league format, each adhering to the same policies, standards and guidelines for competition. AdaptED Sports Students practice weekly with games held on Saturday in each of the 3 ten- week seasons that include wheelchair handball (Fall) , wheelchair basketball (Winter) and wheelchair football (Spring). Through the AAASP/GHSA Alliance, state championships follow each sport season and these students are afforded the same standings and titles as their non-disabled peers. (AAASP differs from Special Olympics in that its athletes do not have a cognitive impairment, only a physical disability. Participants in Special Olympics must have an IQ of 70 or below to be eligible.)

To learn more about AAASP, please visit: <https://adaptedsports.org> .

The American Association of AdaptED Sports Programs (AAASP), headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, is a not-for-profit association dedicated to developing interscholastic adapted sports programs in partnership with national, state, and local educational agencies. It represents a standardized approach to extracurricular adapted team sports and has developed one of the nation's most comprehensive school-based athletic programs for students with physical disabilities attending elementary, middle or high school. For more information, please visit our website at <http://adaptedsports.org> or join our conversations on Twitter at: @AdaptedSports.

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