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## Lions players, celebrities participate in wheelchair basketball to help rehab cause

October 7, 2007

**BY ANTHONY FENECH**  
 FREE PRESS SPECIAL WRITER

The players were introduced, but instead of trotting out, these athletes wheeled out to mid-court.

There was the sweet sound of swish shots and bank shots, and there were even technical fouls, but no jump shots. And, still, it was a basketball game, only this one had no losers.

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At the Detroit Medical Center Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan's Sixth Annual Celebrity Wheelchair basketball game on Sept. 18, a collection of local TV, sports and radio personalities came together and participated -- most for the first time -- in a wheelchair basketball game along with the institute's wheelchair basketball team, the Detroit Diehards. Their efforts raised money for the DMC's SportsAbility program.

The program is designed to provide people with disabilities the opportunity to participate in competitive and recreational sports.

The game took place at University of Detroit Mercy's Calihan Hall, between the gold-clad Detroit Jam and the black-clad Motor City Rollers. Wheelchair athletes joined the celebrities on the two teams. Lions running back Kevin Jones was the Jam head coach. Jones was recovering from a foot injury and wasn't the only one itching to get back to competing.

Jimmy Mocerri, an 18-year-old former high school basketball star at Macomb Dakota, was eager to test his game. Mocerri was injured in an auto accident July 23, 2006, that left him paralyzed.

This was Mocerri's first time back on the court since the accident.

"It was my first time in an actual game; it felt great," a smiling Mocerri said afterward. "I had a lot of fun."

He has been practicing on Tuesday nights with the Michigan Thunderbirds Wheelchair Basketball Team.

Asked how he overcame his injury, Mocerri replied, "Accidents happen; that's why they call them accidents. I had the right attitude the whole time, and I've worked hard ever since I got hurt."

Myreo Dixon, Detroit Diehards cocaptain who participated on the Rollers with Mocerri, said he was impressed with how quickly Mocerri picked up the game.

"He is quick and a really smart player; it's amazing how quickly he has adapted his game to wheelchair basketball," Dixon said.

Two Lions teammates, Mike Furrey and Fernando Bryant, were at the game, along with Jones. Former Lions Scott Kowalkowski and NFL Hall of Famer Lem Barney also served as honorary coaches.

Detroit Pistons guard Lindsay Hunter coached the Rollers and didn't take a seat the entire first half. He even resembled his teammate Rasheed Wallace in picking up a good-natured technical foul late in the first half.

The game was close until the end, with Curtis Carter of the Diehards scoring on a breakaway layup with 34 seconds

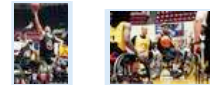
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Detroit Jam's Weusi Olusola, left, fights for the ball against Motor City Rollers' Curtis Carter during the Celebrity Wheelchair game.



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According to the Detroit Medical Center's Web site, its Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan SportsAbility program is funded solely by grants and donations. The program's goals are to provide patients the opportunity to participate in peer support activities and organized sports (both recreational and competitive), and to assist with improving and maintaining wellness, coping skills, leisure activities and quality of life after disability. The program also seeks to improve the adaptive sports programming available in the Detroit area.

To donate to the DMC's Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan, go to [www.rimrehab.org](http://www.rimrehab.org).

To find out more about the SportsAbility program, contact Myreo Dixon at 313-745-6624.

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left, cutting the Jam lead to two.

The gold squad held on for a 27-23 victory, although it could be argued that the only numbers that mattered were the number of smiles that were present at Calihan Hall.

"It's great for us to give back to the community," said Furrey. "You always complain about the little things, but yet somebody always has it worse than you do.

"To be in a situation to come out here, and they don't frown or be sad for what they have; they get in the wheelchair and have fun."

Radio personalities Coco and Foolish, from WJLB-FM 97.9, provided color commentary during the game, often provoking laughs from the crowd.

Cheryl Angelelli, DMC director of marketing and public relations, said she appreciated the support of the local celebrities.

Angelelli, who broke her neck while practicing a new racing dive in 1983 and lives with paralysis, won silver medals in the 200-meter freestyle and the 200-freestyle relay at the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens.

"It's exciting to see everyone that cares about the athletes and our program and what we're doing and that's very rewarding to see, and just knowing the money we're raising is going toward such a great cause," Angelelli said.

All the evening's proceeds went to the DMC Rehabilitation Association of Michigan and its wheelchair sports program. The DMC also sponsors wheelchair tennis clinics and wheelchair water-skiing events.

Also participating in the event were WJLB disc jockeys Dr. Darrius, Bushman and SunShyne.

"We do this every year," SunShyne said. "Being on the radio, we don't work that many hours, so I feel like it's our duty to help out and have a good time. It means a lot to everybody."

Her favorite part was scoring on her second free throw, one that was playfully contested by Hunter and the Rollers squad, because the referees allowed SunShyne to shoot halfway between the foul line and basket.

"I'll always cheat, but that's OK," she said with a laugh. "I'll always score every year."

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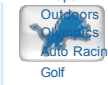
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