

IN

Pine-Richland

**Pine-Richland grad
Mike Van Sickle
makes his debut in
the U.S. Open at
Oakmont**



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Rising Star – On and Off the Ice



Pine teen Nathan Vislosky finds success playing ice and inline hockey.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK



Nathan Vislosky

An 18-year-old Pine resident has become one of the area’s fastest-rising hockey players, both on and off the ice.

This past summer, Nathan Vislosky, a senior at Central Catholic High School, played in his third consecutive Keystone State Games for ice hockey in York, Pa. The Keystone State Games, which are modeled after the Olympics, are the state’s largest annually held multi-sport competition.

While at the Games, Nathan ranked second in goals for Team West, competing against high school players from across the state. He was the youngest player ever to receive a medal in the Games’ collegiate division.

“It was a fantastic experience to have the opportunity to play for the Keystone Games three times in a row,” says Nathan, who is a three-year letterman for Central Catholic.

While he has racked up plenty of accolades in ice hockey, he’s also making a name for himself as an inline hockey player. In June, he competed as a member of Team USA in the 2016 FIRS Inline Hockey World Championships in Asiago, Italy, where he led his team in points, scoring seven goals and three assists. Team USA competed against 30 other countries, finishing in eighth place.

“It was my first time traveling out of the country, and we had the chance to travel all over Italy and meet amazing people,” Nathan says. “It was an unforgettable experience.”

He first began playing hockey at age 3, simply because he wanted to be like his big brother, Andrew, who had started learning to skate. As a young child, however, Nathan wasn’t “too serious” about the game.

“When I first started playing, I would sleep on the bench and mess around a lot,” he says with a laugh.

He continued to play throughout elementary and middle school, but was sidelined by stomach issues that kept him in and out of the hospital for three years.

“For some reason, when I came back to the game after those three years off, I was performing a lot better,” Nathan explains.

The turning point came during his freshman year of high school, when he played his first inline hockey game. “I started racking up points against kids who were three or four years older than me,” he says.

Although he’s played both offensive and defensive positions, Nathan says he enjoys playing “D” more. “I love being able to sit back and see the play roll out in front of me,” he says.

At 5’8”, Nathan is shorter than most defensive players but says that what he lacks in height, he makes up for in speed.

“Speed is the most important thing,” he explains. “If you can skate well, you can outpace anyone. I might not have the reach or the stride of other players, but I can move my feet.”

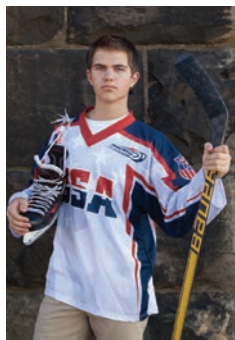
The All-Star player’s hard work has not gone unnoticed; after he returned from Italy, Pittsburgh City Council issued a formal proclamation, thanking Nathan for representing the U.S. in competition.

“I was not expecting that at all,” he says. “I was proud to receive that. It was quite a surprise.”

When he’s not competing, Nathan volunteers for the Mighty Pens sled hockey team, serves as the regional president of his school’s Future Business Leaders of America organization and participates in track and field. After he graduates from high school, he wants to attend Penn State University to study chemical engineering.

Whether Nathan will continue building upon his burgeoning hockey career remains to be seen; he’s concerned that pursuing such a tough major will leave little time for the commitment that ice hockey requires. Instead, he might focus on playing only inline hockey while in college.

“I’m going to miss my teammates. I’m going to miss the consistency of being able to see them all the time,” he says. “I love this sport. So, we’ll see what happens.” ■



In Full SWING

Pine-Richland
grad
Mike Van Sickle
makes his debut
at the
U.S. Open.

By Jennifer Brozak
Photos by Brian Routhieux

Mike Van Sickle's
Pirates pants were a
big hit with local fans.



When Mike Van Sickle was a young boy, he used to tag along with his dad on the golf course.

Three decades later, Van Sickle would find himself hitting the links as a professional golfer at the U.S. Open in Oakmont.

For the 2005 graduate of Pine-Richland High School, playing at the U.S. Open this past summer was nothing short of a dream come true.

After first being selected as an alternate, he learned in June that he had qualified for the U.S. Open.

“The whole qualifying experience was just such an emotional rollercoaster,” says Van Sickle. “I was crushed after I lost the playoffs. So, to play the U.S. Open in my hometown—it was just incredible.”

Van Sickle’s introduction to golf came from his father, Gary Van Sickle, a senior golf writer for Sports Illustrated magazine.

“He loved to play golf, so it was pretty smart of him to offer to take me to the course with him,” Van Sickle says with a laugh.

Throughout his elementary and middle school years, Van Sickle, who’s now married with a baby of his own, traveled with his father to different tournaments. While he enjoyed playing golf, he was also a standout basketball player in high school. He lettered three years in a row and even hit a three-pointer at the buzzer to win a game against North Allegheny.

“It was always my dream to be on the PGA Tour,” he explains. “So by my junior year, I knew I had to draw a line in the sand and take it more seriously.”

Van Sickle, 29, says he “ramped up” his golf game, ultimately becoming the WPIAL champion in 2003 and 2004.

After graduating from high school, he went to Marquette University, where his mother, Betsy, had once served as the sports information director. At Marquette, Van Sickle excelled on the men’s golf team. For two consecutive seasons, he was selected for the All-Big East First Team and then, in his junior year, became the first amateur player since 1955 to win back-to-back Pennsylvania Open Championships in 2007 and 2008. During his senior year, he received the esteemed Byron Nelson Award and was named Big East Conference Player of the Year. In 2009, he was one of only eight American players to be named to the United States Palmer Cup team, where he was able to play alongside the great Arnold Palmer.

Van Sickle finished his college experience as the all-time leader at Marquette in career victories, scoring average, career rounds of par-or-better, tournament finish percentage and career rounds played. He graduated from Marquette in 2009 with a degree in broadcast and electronic communications, and then decided to turn pro.

“I felt like I was getting better every year in college, and I had won five collegiate events, so it was an easy decision. I knew if I worked hard enough, I could succeed,” he says.

Soon into his professional career, however, his game was interrupted by persistent shoulder and rib injuries that left him unable to play his best golf.

“I couldn’t hit the ball like I wanted to. It was incredibly frustrating. A lot of humble pie was eaten that year,” Van Sickle notes.

It was during that period that he had lunch with the Pittsburgh Pirates’ Neil Walker, a former teammate from the Pine-Richland basketball team. Walker sent him to his own trainer, who found out that the golfer had several ribs out of place. The trainer popped the ribs back in, which also alleviated his shoulder pain.

After healing from his injuries, Van Sickle had to learn to trust his swing again.

“I still couldn’t hit the ball. It was very frustrating. I had to get my game back to where I could succeed,” he says.

In 2012, Van Sickle played the Chiquita Classic and the Neediest Kids Championship and then, in 2014, he played the Web.com Tour Qualifying Tournament. In 2015, he played 11 events and had two top-10 finishes. Reaching the U.S. Open, however, has been his greatest personal achievement thus far, even though he was cut after the second round.

“It was a lot to try to get acclimated to,” he recalls. “The gallery’s there, you’re the local media story of the week—it was a different experience. To play the U.S. Open in your hometown, there was a lot of pressure to go out and play perfectly.”

Still, he relished the opportunity.

“Oakmont has always been my favorite course. It’s hard, but fair,” he explains. “At the end of the day, the goal is to just go out and play golf, and that’s what I did.” ■



Van Sickle with his son, Harvey.

