



2021

# Impact Report

*Changing the lives of youth & veterans  
with physical disabilities through the  
power of adaptive sports & recreation*



**MULTI-SPORT  
ORGANIZATION**

# BlazeSports

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## **BlazeSports America Friends, Volunteers and Supporters –**

What an exciting year it has been for BlazeSports, as we celebrated our 25th anniversary, and the anniversary of the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics. The Atlanta games changed the Olympics and Paralympics forever, marking the first time the games were held together on US soil and setting the stage for all future games. In addition, the 1996 Paralympics left the city a great legacy in the creation of BlazeSports. And now, 25 years later, we are working every day to continue that legacy of serving youth and veterans with disabilities through adaptive sports and ensuring the quality, diversity and availability of our programs are equal to sport programs open to those without disabilities.

In 2021, we expanded the BlazeSports program offering by adding tennis as a new and permanent BlazeSports youth and veteran weekly program. This expansion has led to four weekly youth programs and eight weekly veteran programs. Additionally, we expanded the BlazeSports veteran program to include those with PTSD / PTD. This year, we hosted our first Blaze Day in the community in Atlanta's underserved westside to introduce adaptive sports to new individuals. We also hosted the first ever Peachtree Paragames, a three-day Paralympic style event with archery, track and field, swimming, the Toddler Games and several adaptive sport clinics. We look forward to this new annual event expanding through the years.

In February 2021, we launched a new board structure and as part of this process the by-laws were updated. We are very excited to have welcomed two new board members to the BlazeSports board in December and with a full heart to say thank you to Dan Holland for his over 15 years of service on the BlazeSports board, many as our board chair. In August 2021, we launched our new website and brand video, and we hope you have had a chance to see it.

Wow, what a year! Thank you to all our athletes, family members, staff, and volunteers for an amazing 2021. We look forward to building on all the success of this past year and to having an outstanding 2022.

Best Wishes,



**Dawn Churi**  
Executive Director



**Andy McNeil**  
Board Chair

# Mission

To change the lives of children, youth and veterans with physical disabilities through adaptive sport, physical activity and recreation.

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# Vision

Our vision is that every individual with a physical disability has the access and opportunity to experience the joys and benefits of sport and physical activity in all aspects of their lives.

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## ***BlazeSports Board of Directors 2021***

### **Chairman**

Andrew McNeil, Esq.

Duane Morrow

Richard Evans

Ira Blumenthal

Kim Blumenthal

John T. Smith

Mechelle Brown

## ***BlazeSports Parent Advisory Board 2021***

Kelli Munkel (Chair)

Susan Fraser

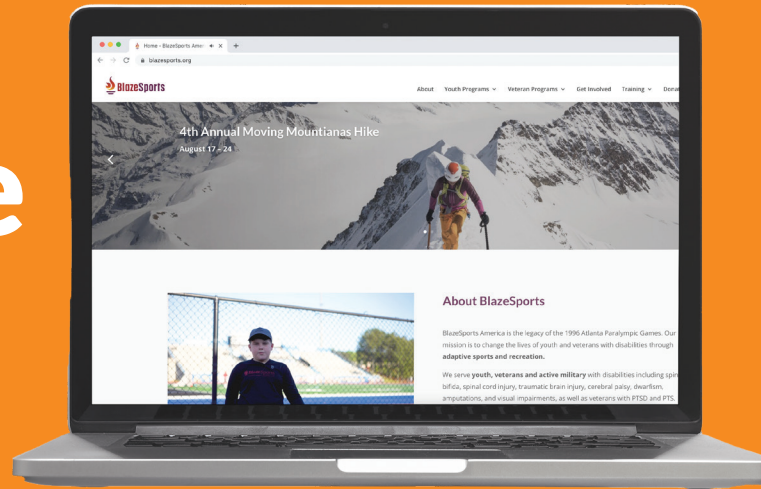
Don Grimsley

Mechelle Brown

# New logo and Website

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In 2021 we brought on Trevlino / Keller (TK) as our PR and digital marketing agency. In August 2021, we launched our new logo, website and brand video.



## THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND Return to Play

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In 2021 BlazeSports followed the CDC and the Department of Public Health guidelines while safely operating return to play in person for all of our adaptive sports.

Decisions on return to play were made based on science, guidance from the CDC and state and local public health officials as well as National Governing Bodies for each sport.





# 2021 Events

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## Military Family Camp

*February 27th, 2021*

BlazeSports Veterans and their families joined us for a family fun day at Camp Twin Lakes. Groups were separated by family groups and socially distant fun activities for all ages were provided including: rock climbing, archery, canoeing, fishing and much more. Many families had multi-generations attend and this was a great event for everyone to get back together after separation due to COVID.



## Big Peach Slam Jam Wheelchair Basketball Tournament

*May 15 - 16, 2021*

The 2021 BlazeSports Big Peach Slam Jam presented by the Atlanta Hawks was the largest tournament of its kind in the Southeast. Sanctioned by the NWBA, the 5th annual Big Peach Slam Jam welcomed teams and states from across the US representing Varsity and Prep divisions. Hosted at the brand new Acworth Community Center, we were excited to offer one of the few in-person tournaments in 2021. Congratulations to all of the teams and athletes who demonstrated great sportsmanship and skill on the court.

## Peachtree Paragames

*June 11th-13th, 2021*

The Peachtree Paragames is a multi-sport competitive event with a variety of divisions for the developmental to the elite athlete. Sports that were offered included: archery, track and field, and swimming. This event was a great success and we look forward to hosting the Paragames annually each summer.



## Camp Phoenix

*July 4th-9th, 2021*

BlazeSports Camp Phoenix, located at Camp Twin Lakes in Winder GA, gives kids and teens with a physical disability, a chance to learn and participate in a variety of adaptive sports and recreational activities, while building leadership and self-advocacy skills, developing greater independence, and – making lifelong friends.

# 2021 Events

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## Second Annual Run & Roll

*August 4th, 2021*

BlazeSports 2nd Annual Run & Roll 5k was again held virtually and had 99 participants with a total revenue of \$11,002.

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## Blaze Day in the community

*September 25th, 2021*

Taking place on Atlanta's westside, Blaze Day gave both current and new athletes the ability to try new adaptive sports in addition to introducing adaptive sports to a new and under-served community. Sports Included wheelchair basketball, tennis, lacrosse, cycling and yoga.



## National Parasport Conference

*October 14th-15th, 2021*

Hosted by BlazeSports, the theme for the event was, "Coming Together-Moving Forward" which reflects how we can continue to grow and improve the Parasport community for providers and athletes.

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## Triumph of the Human Spirit

*November 3rd, 2021*

The Triumph of the Human Spirit Awards honor those who have made a significant impact through adaptive sports and recreation. Those who inspire, motivate and truly epitomize the Triumph of the Human Spirit.



# Athlete Accomplishments

## Senior Spotlight 2021

We are proud to present a class of impressive BlazeSports athletes who graduated this year and will make an impact in the world around them as future alumni. The BlazeSports seniors had a 100% graduation rate from high school with 90% going to a post-secondary education, several to play wheelchair basketball in college.



**Thomas Cade Maynor**

"Always work as a team and put in the hard work!"



**Eric-Randolph Benjamin Francis**

Great teamwork, hard work and communication are the keys to success.



**Devin White**

"Teamwork makes the dream work."



**Keith Debrosse**

Favorite BlazeSports memory was playing in his first basketball game this past year at blaze.



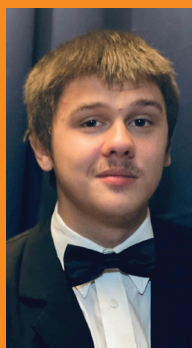
**Mason Blake McCartney**

Favorite BlazeSports memory is eating lunch with his team after practices.



**Megan Elizabeth Miller**

During her time with blaze, she has learned strong leadership skills and the benefit of working together as a team.



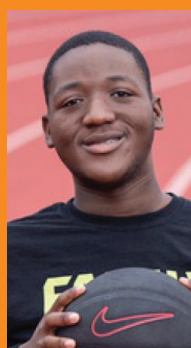
**Michael Lynn Kitchens**

"Teamwork makes the dream work and there is no i in team. some of the best players are those that help and support others in scoring the points."



**Seth James Earley**

Favorite BlazeSports memory was competing in the 2020 Big Peach Slam Jam.



**Yahweh D'rembe-Olajuwon Askin**

He loves the game of basketball and knows how to be a team player. Traveling with the team and being around more kids like him brings him joy. Understanding the true meaning of team is what he stands on!



# Training & Education

## *Building Capacity in Adaptive Sport and Physical Activity Nationwide*



### **The BlazeSports America Certified Adaptive Recreation and Sports Specialist™**

In 2021, BlazeSports hosted the 2021 National Parasport Conference in Acworth, GA on October 14th-15th. With attendees joining both virtually and in-person, we brought together industry leaders in parasport from across the country. Our theme this year, "Coming Together-Moving Forward" reflected how we can continue to grow and improve the parasport community for both providers and athletes alike.

Our 6 conference tracks help to connect the major areas in parasport as well as reflect current trends.

As part of the conference, we launched two new BlazeSports Institute certifications, The Adaptive Rowing Coach Certification and the Certified Adaptive Sports Coach (CASC). These along with CARSS I & II, bring the BlazeSports certification program up to four certifications with a 5th to launch in 2022.

### **BlazeTOTS**

BlazeTOTS is a new BlazeSports initiative that aims to increase opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities to be physically active and eat healthy. 2021, marked the first full year of the implementation of our BlazeTOTS program in the community and several important milestones were achieved this year.



- Creation of the BlazeTOTS Implementation Guide
- Launched the first two BlazeTOTS Flagship Locations – City of Refuge and Finch Elementary
- Launched first three BlazeTOTS Community Implementation Sites at Apparo Academy, CHOA and Faith First Fitness
- Provided four training opportunities utilizing the BlazeTOTS Leader Curriculum to those that work in early childcare
- Hosted a virtual training webinar utilizing the BlazeTOTS curriculum targeting families with toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities
- Produced 4 videos to promote sport/physical activity and healthy eating for preschoolers with disabilities
- Launched the annual Family Play Day
- Created the BlazeTOTS equipment loan program



### **Youth LEAD**

Youth LEAD is an initiative of BlazeSports aimed at helping prepare young people with physical disabilities for adulthood through the transformative power of sport.

BlazeSports Youth LEAD program supports youth with physical disabilities' need to be actively involved in activities that will expose them to and offer the opportunity to practice not only the actual skills needed for a particular career, but also the work readiness skills needed to ultimately find and maintain employment.

As part of the new board structure, we have added a new athlete council for our youth and veteran athletes to serve as a sounding board for BlazeSports planning, as well as, to give leadership opportunities and a voice to our athletes. The first meeting of the youth council was Saturday, December 18, 2021. We hosted a day of team building, onboarding and leadership training for our athlete council members.

### **The board members for the 2021 are:**

Collin Lancaster – basketball, tennis, wheelchair track  
Tyler Brown – swimming  
Jude Hiley – basketball, tennis  
Samantha Fraser – basketball, tennis, ambulatory track  
Abby Coffin – basketball, tennis  
Zach Armas – basketball  
Maggie Arnold – basketball, tennis, ambulatory track, swimming  
Yan Babayeuski – swimming

### **Youth LEAD Webinars**

- Finding Your Passion, How to Navigate Life Post High School? March 19th, 2021
- Navigating Transitions: How to help Your Child or Teen Prepare For the Future. February 22, 2021
- Financial Literacy Workshop, June 6th, 2021



# Youth & Veteran Programs

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*BlazeSports uses sport as a vehicle for positive development, improved health and success on and off the field of play.*

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*In 2021, BlazeSports expanded the youth population by 25%. We added 90 new veterans, which represents a 36% increase in active participants. Our track and field numbers are at an all-time high and we sent a record 12 athletes to Junior Nationals in Colorado.*

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## Youth Programs

*Offered Year-Round*

- Wheelchair Basketball – Prep, Varsity Red and Varsity White Teams
- Track & Field
- Swimming – Learn to Swim and Learn to Train
- Wheelchair Tennis

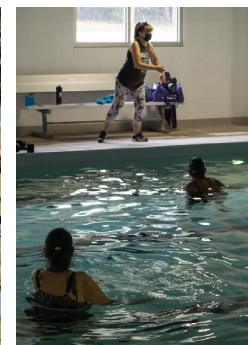
### Youth Sport Clinics

- Lacrosse Clinics
- Pickle Ball
- Tennis
- Rock Climbing

## Veteran Programs

*Offered Year-Round*

- Archery
- Bowling
- CrossFit
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Yoga
- Water Aerobics
- Tennis



## BLAZESPORTS AMERICA LAUNCHES NEW VETERAN PROGRAMS

BlazeSports is happy to announce the expansion of our Veteran Programs to include veterans with PTSD and/or PTS. This expanded programming, which for the past ten years focused on Veterans with physical disabilities, will help those veterans in need of mental health support. BlazeSports is one of a few organizations in the Metro Atlanta area that provides weekly assistance to veterans as opposed to one-time events. We believe that sport and recreation is an integral part of the Veteran community reintegration process post-injury.

# THANK YOU

To all our generous partners, funders, sponsors and individual donors who supported BlazeSports programs and services throughout 2021. We are grateful!

### BlazeSports sponsors:

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# 2021 Financial Summary

Figures based on BlazeSports FY2021 Audited Financial Statements, Mersereau, Lazenby & Rockas LLC.

## REVENUE AND OTHER SUPPORT

	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL
Contributions	\$97,299	\$0	\$97,299
Foundation Grants and Sponsors	\$124,182	\$18,236	\$142,418
Fees and other Revenue	\$67,743	\$0	\$67,743
State Grants	\$0	\$390,029	\$390,029
Government Grants	\$0	\$119,478	\$119,478
License Tags	\$17,406	\$0	\$17,406
Investment Income	\$30	\$0	\$30
Pandemic-related Income	\$163,238		\$163,238
Net Assets Released from Restriction – Satisfaction of Program Restrictions	\$715,575	(\$715,575)	--
<b>Total Revenue and Other Support</b>	<b>\$1,185,473</b>	<b>(\$187,832)</b>	<b>\$997,641</b>

## EXPENSES

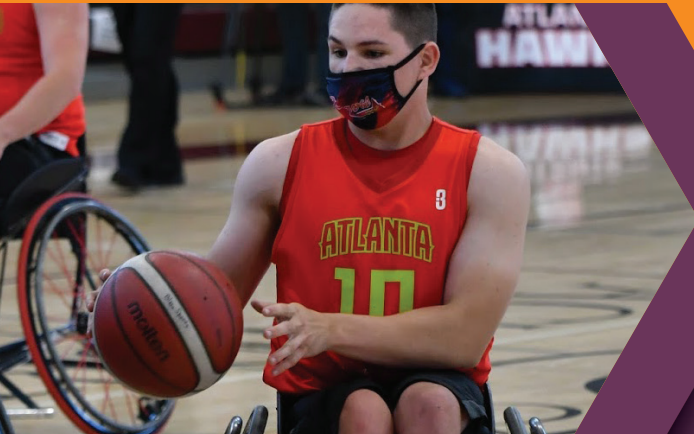
	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL
Program Services	\$642,749	\$0	\$642,749
Management and General	\$142,306	\$0	\$142,306
Fundraising	\$53,801	\$0	\$53,801
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$838,856</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$838,856</b>

	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL
Change in Net Assets	\$346,617	(\$187,832)	\$158,785
Net Assets, beginning of year	(\$176,404)	\$200,286	\$23,882
Net Assets, end of year	\$170,213	\$12,454	\$182,667



BlazeSports America is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and the legacy organization of the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games. We offer adaptive sport programs and services that support good health, build leadership skills, foster independence and inclusion and reduce social isolation. Our training and education builds the capacity of current and future leaders in the field. BlazeSports is the two-time recipient of the US Olympic and Paralympics Rings of Gold (2016 and 2017), a member of the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee Organizational Council, and the USA Member of Cerebral Palsy International Sport and Recreation Association.



## BlazeSports America

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