

# Wiz on Wheels - Nixa native takes hockey skills to next level

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Move over, Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin. There's a new kid who wants to play on your team. Nixa's Braden Sisco can't wait to be a Pittsburgh Penguin when he gets older, but in the world of hockey he doesn't have that long to wait.

The 12-year-old Nixa native, who once scored nine goals—three hat tricks—in a single game, is making a name for himself in roller hockey. Braden just returned from Huntington Beach, Calif., after a second-place finish in the finals of the World Youth Cup Junior Olympics with Team USA, scoring twice against Hong Kong in an 8-3 loss.

“The rinks were awesome, but I don't really like California,” Braden said. “The beach was fun, but there's a bunch of seaweed, jellyfish and other stuff.”

Braden is a quiet and unsuspecting child who will make you laugh with unexpected comments but avoids talking about himself.

“He never wants to talk about himself, ever,” mother Amy Sisco said. “He doesn't like to take credit for what he does.”

Dad Richard Sisco agrees.

“I just like seeing the transition from being easygoing and everybody's friend to being out on the floor and fighting for the puck,” he said. “If you don't know you're a good player, then you would obviously shy away from trying out and playing in big tournaments.”

And there was a tryout process for the World Youth Cup Junior Olympics, but the sixth-grader didn't have to travel to California and go through it.

“He didn't have to try out because he's been on team Missouri for four years,” Amy Sisco said. “So,



## Braden Sisco

Braden Sisco of Nixa displays his Silver Medal won in the finals of the World Youth Cup Junior Olympics with Team USA July 18.

his coach talked to the USA officials and they looked at his record then decided to put him directly on the team.”

That was no surprise for his parents, who have been watching their son play since 2010 as a member of the traveling team competing at State Wars, the United States Roller Hockey tournament. Teams represent 30 states across the country vying to be champion.

“It’s really hard but a really fun thing to do,” Braden said. “You get to play with a completely different team and different players.”

Medals hang from a custom-made rack on a wall in his room. It’s complete with the outline of a hockey player and Braden’s No. 19 painted on it. Amy Sisco beams talking about her son then pauses for a moment to reflect on his accomplishments.

“I’m pretty proud of him. I love watching him play,” she said. “I probably couldn’t be more proud of what he’s doing right now.”

His older sister, Bailey, gets into the games, too. She’s the one in sitting the stands, giving directions.

“A lot of the time I’m yelling at him to move his feet and pass the puck,” she said. “Sometimes he will get to the point where he’s not moving as fast as I want him to move.”

### Discovering hockey

Braden found roller hockey by accident when he was 5 years old. His sister, Bailey, was at birthday party at Springfield Skateland when he noticed a flier on the wall.

“Picking hockey was not something that we really sought out. We just happened to be at a skating party. The first practice was free, and they loan you the equipment,” Richard Sisco said. “We looked at ice hockey in the past but really never made the commitment there, so we thought, ‘We’ll see if he’s any good at it.’”

Braden was good. He took to the sport immediately, prompting his parents to write a check for all his equipment the same night. The first time skating on the court is still fresh in his memory.

“Hockey wasn’t that popular, and there were only 10 people. I wasn’t very good, and everyone else was better than me,” Braden said. “It bothered me. So, I tried really hard to get up the ladder.”

He was the beginner who tried to make friends with everyone. He would take lessons with coaches to get better as fast as possible. When not at practice, he would “go there to shoot and mess around by myself,” he said.

By his third year of playing hockey, Braden realized the sport was fun instead of work.

“Everyone was at the same level. Nobody was better or worse than the other, so everyone was a team,” Braden said.

Kids started to leave the hockey program the following year. Some were swayed by different sports and others decided not to play hockey, but Braden kept going.

“The team got smaller. Some came back but left again because they didn’t think they could get back to the level everyone else was at,” he said.

There are coaches who say the dwindling numbers of homegrown hockey stars can be blamed in part on rigorous team schedules, with too many games and too little practice, but it’s the exception and not the rule for Braden.

He practices every week, and it’s his playing ability that is drawing attention from the older crowd, which includes the Missouri State Roller Hockey team.

In his Springfield Skateland Snipers hockey jersey, Braden picks up the puck, moves along the boards, then away from a defender to wrist a shot on goal. The speed and direction of the puck is too much for the goaltender, who watches as it flies past his glove for a goal.

“He’s fortunate because he gets to play with the adults on Wednesday nights,” Amy Sisco said. “He gains a lot from playing with them.”

Richard Sisco credits his son for taking an intellectual approach to the game, thinking through every drill and questioning them at practices.

“He will ask coaches to explain why he’s being put through a drill,” Richard Sisco said. “What is this drill? What does this accomplish? What’s the point of it?” He doesn’t just do it because the coach tells him to.”

The transition

Penguins netminder Marc-Andre Fleury, who went 23-8 with a 2.39 goals-against average and .916 save percentage in the 2012-2013 season, is Braden’s favorite player.

That doesn’t seem strange coming from a scorer who has made a name for himself but plays in leagues where accurate statistics are non-existent. He first attempted to play in goal but was quickly discouraged. Braden doesn’t regret the decision and is happy facing the net rather than facing pucks.

“I couldn’t be a goalie because I was better as a forward. I had already developed too much to become a goalie,” Braden said. “Now, I just want to score and win.”

Only two players—Pat Lafontaine, St. Louis, third pick overall of the New York Islanders in 1983; and Landon Wilson, St. Louis, 19th pick overall of the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1993—who learned to play hockey in Missouri have been selected in the first round of the NHL Draft. That’s not to say Braden won’t be the next Crosby or reach a higher level.

Getting past the different surfaces is obvious to Braden. Roller hockey takes place on a sport-court

and is also played with four skaters a side while ice hockey has five. Roller—also known as inline—does not have offsides or icing rules. In other words, skaters generally have more freedom to skate and shoot in roller hockey.

Braden knows he will have to make the transition to ice before he conquers his NHL dream, but the pieces are in place.

This year he plans on taking ice hockey lessons at Mediacom Ice Park—not that the wiz on wheels needs it.

“I just have to learn how to stop on ice,” Braden said.

Until then it’s on to the 2013 State Wars Roller Hockey tournament with team Missouri July 31-Aug. 3 in Darien, Ill., and Braden won’t stop until he skates home with the championship.

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