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Sports

# Stu Cowan: Virtual softball tournament ends up being a big hit

*After 37 years, the Mike Reid memorial tournament is closing in on \$1-million mark in money raised to help students at Mackay Centre School.*

Stu Cowan • Montreal Gazette

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Photo of Mike Reid taken approximately two years before his death as a result of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The annual Mike Reid Memorial Softball Tournament in Greenfield Park has raised \$950,000 over the years. Courtesy of the Reid family

One of the highlights of my summer vacation every August is playing on a team representing the Mackay Centre School at the Mike Reid Memorial Softball Tournament in Greenfield Park.

The annual tournament was first held in 1985 in memory of Mike Reid, who died the previous year at age 20 after a long and courageous battle with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Wade Wilson, who grew up across the street from Reid, got together with some buddies and decided to organize the tournament to keep Reid's memory alive and also raise money for the Mackay Centre School, where Reid had been a student. The money raised goes to pay for extracurricular activities at the school, which services students who are deaf, physically disabled and/or have a communication disorder.

Ravens' Peters: 'I want to be a champion, at the end of the day'



After holding the memorial softball tournament for 35 consecutive years, it looked like COVID-19 restrictions would end the streak last year. Over the years, the tournament has become about much more than just softball and raising money for charity. It has also become a big social event on the South Shore.

Wilson came up with an idea to save the event. How about a virtual softball tournament?

“I was thinking to myself what a shame to have to stop this tournament,” Wilson said. “I was trying to think of ideas how we could somehow keep it going and still generate some funds. Normally we would

raise between \$40,000 and \$50,000 each year from the tournament. But we figured whatever we could generate would help for their extracurricular activities.

“I came up with the idea of let’s do it virtually,” he added. “I had no idea how it would take off or how it would be received. However, the reception was unbelievable.”

The virtual tournament ended up raising \$18,500 with 32 teams paying a \$150 fee to enter. Food and beer sales make up a big portion of the money normally raised at the tournament, so Wilson and the event organizers decided to sell “virtual beers” online last year as well as holding a raffle for a custom-built backyard cooler and selling ads on the tournament website.

“Believe it or not, we sold over \$5,000 of virtual beers that nobody actually drinks,” Wilson said.



Charlotte Bazinet, left, and Ethan Burt take part in a group reading assignment at the Mackay Centre School in 2017. Money raised in the Mike Reid softball tournament goes to pay for extracurricular activities at the school, which services students who are deaf, physically disabled and/or have a communication disorder. PHOTO BY ALLEN MCINNIS /Montreal Gazette

As in previous years, a tournament draw was held to set up the first-round matchups with the winning team advancing to the A Division and the losing team going to the B Division with games running Thursday through Sunday and champions crowned in both divisions. Numbers 1 through 17 were placed in the Mike Reid Memorial Trophy and a number was pulled out for each team and that was their number of runs scored. The virtual results were also shown live [on the tournament's Facebook page](#).

“One day we had over 2,000 viewers,” Wilson said. “There were people having home parties watching the Mike Reid tournament at their home to see if they were going to advance. The nice thing about this is that family and friends who don’t actually play softball can now also participate and their team has a chance of getting their name on the trophy. In the virtual tournament every team has a chance to win because it’s the luck of the draw.”

With the unpredictability of COVID-19 restrictions this year, Wilson had to cancel the on-field Mike Reid tournament again, but there will be another virtual tournament. The memorial tournament has raised \$950,000 over the years and Wilson has set a goal of hitting the \$1-million mark if not this year then definitely next.

This year there are 40 teams registered for the 37th annual Mike Reid Memorial Tournament with the virtual games starting Thursday night and continuing through Sunday. Virtual beers will be sold again, 200 squares already sold out at \$10 each for a raffle to win another custom-made cooler and there’s a half-and-half draw on the tournament Facebook page. There’s also an auction for a Canadiens T-shirt and hat autographed by Nick Suzuki.

“Once again, we’re trying to make the best of a bad situation,” Wilson said.

That’s exactly what Reid tried to do while battling the most serious type of muscular dystrophy with his friends and family members saying he never complained as he first had to wear leg braces and was eventually confined to a wheelchair. Reid was passionate about sports and wheelchair hockey became his favourite to play. He loved the Boston Bruins and Bobby Orr, the Expos’ Gary Carter and he also loved the Mackay Centre School, which he entered in 1971.

In 1982, Reid received the Mackay Centre’s Prudence Baxter Award for scholastic achievement and he also became Quebec’s poster child for the annual Jerry Lewis Labour Day telethon for muscular dystrophy. After travelling to the WPTZ studios in Plattsburgh, N.Y., to appear on TV as part of the telethon, Reid decided that he wanted to become a TV sportscaster after graduating from the Mackay

Centre.

Sadly, that never happened.

On June 12, 1984, the day Reid was supposed to graduate, he died peacefully at the Montreal Children's Hospital while surrounded by his family and close friends.

The annual softball tournament has kept memories of Reid alive and also helped a lot of other kids.

Not even a pandemic could stop that.

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