

TRENDSETTERS

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FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

Nick Zalkow spends time off the football field making sure other kids have the same athletic opportunities he did

BY GRETCHEN PAHIA
PHOTOS BY CARL SCHULTZ

Playing competitive sports as a child was an outlet that Nick Zalkow looked forward to day-in and day-out. The feeling of team camaraderie, healthy competition, and dedication to oneself and others was helpful for Zalkow as life at home was quite

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up close

often emotionally difficult. Zalkow grew up with divorced parents, and quickly gravitated to team sports, both because of his natural ability for athleticism but also for the team spirit feeling he received.

It is because of these feelings that he had as a young child, that now as an athletic and active teenager, Zalkow wanted to figure out a way to be sure other kids and teens were able to enjoy the same activities, no matter their economic situation. That is when he envisioned a way to help out kids and students across the Valley.

Zalkow, along with the help of his father Andy, created the charitable organization Every Kid Plays. The organization aims to ensure that no matter a child's financial situation or economic background, they won't be at a disadvantage because they lack useable sporting equipment or have difficulty participating in sports activities.

"I've been fortunate enough to be able to participate in any sport I am able to play," Zalkow explains. "There are plenty of kids out there who can't afford to play sports, pay for equipment, or even get a new jersey. If I have the ability to help them, I want to give kids the opportunity to do the same."

The initial funds for the organization were given by Zalkow and his family, and the hope now is to continue to grow the endowment so that many additional schools and kids will be able to benefit from the good that Every Kid Plays is attempting to bring to the Valley.

"We started this up just me and my dad, because it was hard to ask people for money when you didn't have much of a leg to stand on. However, now that we have some successes to talk about, we hope that in the near future we will be able to start doing much more fundraising."

So far, in just their initial grant cycle, Every Kid Plays is distributing funds to six Valley schools.

Zalkow is the driving force behind Every Kid Plays, but he certainly is not going at it alone. Along with his father, aiding him in this journey are local attorney Michael Gillette and competitive swimmer Briana Willia.

Gillette says it is exciting to watch this grow from the ground up: "We have done a lot of good just in our early stages and

certainly there is a lot more to be done. It is really great to see Nick's vision come to life."

The organization's funds are handled by an advisory committee, the Arizona Community Foundation, which helps administer the money appropriately. This is important to Zalkow, especially to ensure that not only the kids who most deserve the money receive it in the most timely manner, but also that the funds are not distributed inappropriately.

Gillette also agrees the foundation is the best answer for helping distribute the funds. "We used specific data points to determine where some of the most need is for schools, and it is those data points which we use to help disperse the money," he explains. "The foundation has been helpful for us from an officiating standpoint."

Zalkow recently began his senior year of high school at Scottsdale Christian Academy, and he is keeping busy with football and even took classes over the summer to get his real estate license. Gillette says despite all of this, he clearly believes in Zalkow's ability to keep Every Kid Plays going strong. "It is clearly Nick's intent to continue the organization moving forward now and past high

school. He definitely has his own motor, since at the very basic level, there is a real passion for sports and athletics."

Zalkow says that while he believes it may be tough to keep things going strong during his senior year with all the activities he is pursuing, he agrees that it is fully his intent to keep Every Kid Plays moving forward at a strong pace.

"I want to keep this going, I want to be able to provide what we can anywhere to kids who play sports. While it is really challenging now with football, college applications and school, I want to do everything that I possibly can and really want to get involved."

"I also don't want to stop pursuing this organization after high school, I want to keep helping in college and long after. I am hopeful there will be a bigger network of people who I can turn to for help once I go to college and we can eventually expand our program to all of Arizona, especially to areas where there is a lot of need and kids are struggling."

Every Kid Plays is currently accepting donations from anyone who would like to help. For more information on the organization, visit www.everykidplays.org.

