

A Lasting Impact

By Frank Shala

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does.”

-Nelson Mandela

At the intersection of sports and impact stands the desire to make a difference in an abundance of ways. When the hockey team at the United States Military Academy (USMA) recently welcomed a new player to their family this week, it was more than just any ordinary signing.

16-year-old Seff Villanueva enjoys the fruits of his teenage years like most high school students. He’s an avid computer gamer and cheers on his New York Rangers of the National Hockey League when he’s not suited up for his school team. His playing career is limited however, due to a rare genetic disorder that doesn’t allow him to play in games.

After watching Seff struggle in his day-to-day life, his family decided to partner with Team IMPACT, a national non-profit organization that pairs children facing serious illnesses and disabilities with college athletic teams across the country. According to Team IMPACT’s [model](#) – “Team IMPACT guides a symbiotic relationship between teams and children focused on socialization, empowerment, and resilience.”

Army Hockey head coach Brian Riley jumped at the chance to welcome Seff aboard the team. After an initial tour of the prestigious Academy and the top-tier athletic facilities that USMA has to offer, an official signing ceremony sealed the deal for Villanueva to join the Black Knights.

Seff will participate in many activities with the team over the next two years, including games, practices, and other special events. His parents know that this extended relationship will no doubt play a lasting part in Villanueva’s continued battle not only physically, but in his academics, social skills, and just overall resilience.

The cadet-athletes at USMA are true pillars of character and serve as the perfect role models for anyone in any walk of life. The return “investment” that Riley and the players spoke about is what truly makes this a full-circle connection.

“I know he’s going to make a positive impact on all our lives because of the opportunity we’re going to get to be around him,” said Riley.

Most often you get what you give in this world. That holds possibly no truer when it comes to impact. Sometimes when you seek out to inspire, educate, or mentor someone, you are the one who ends up feeling more fulfilled.