

May 14, 2021

Student earns degree and TikTok fame while at UWS

"The Hockey Guys" account has more than 452K followers

The story had everything: humor, friendship, suspense and a surprise ending. It's been viewed 23 million times. And it all unfolded in less than 10 seconds.

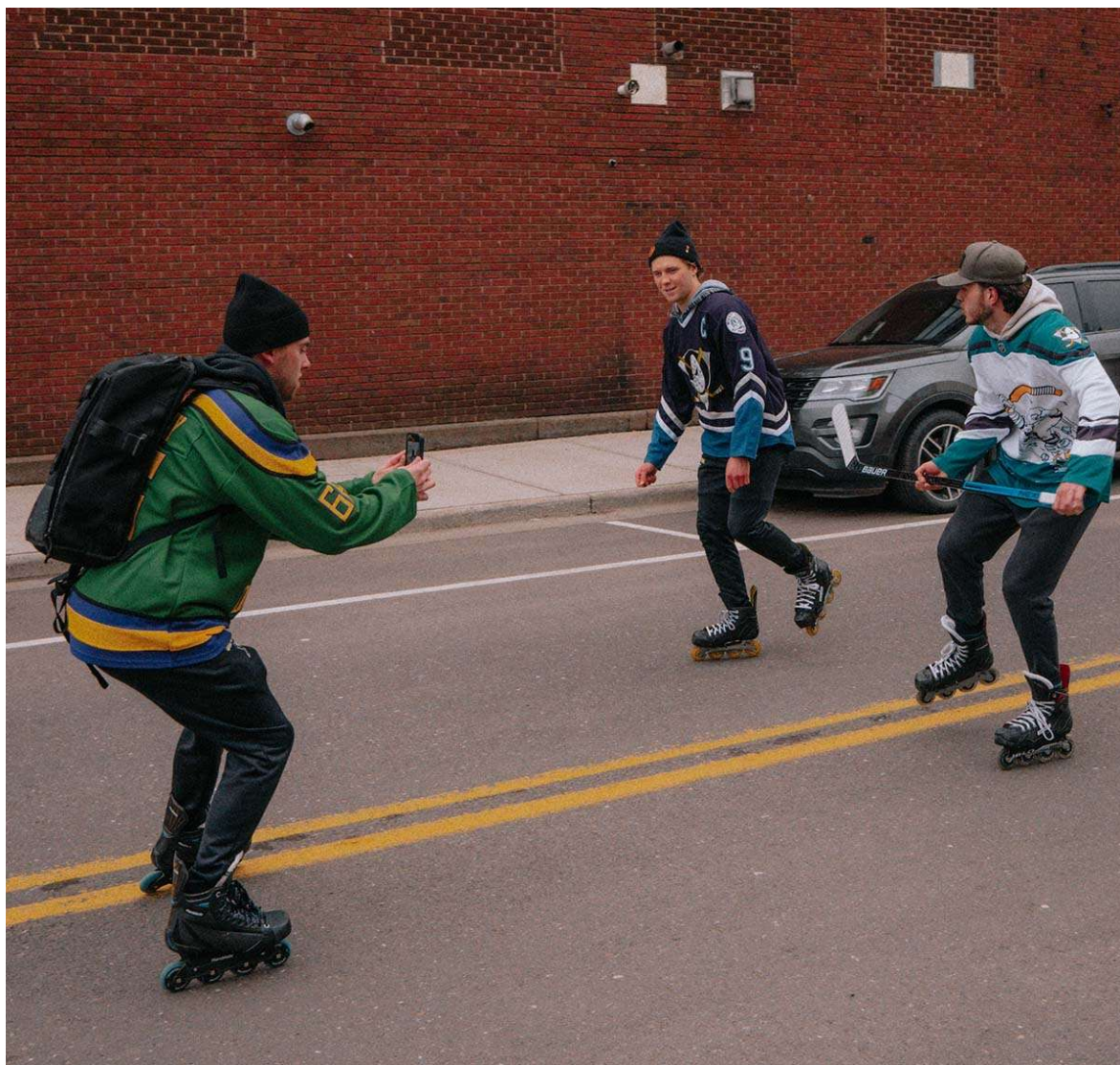
It was only the second video that Lawson McDonald had ever posted to TikTok back in October 2019. Since then, the senior exercise physiology major, who graduates this month, has gone on to create the immensely popular "The Hockey Guys" TikTok account, amassing 452,000 followers along the way.

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Graduation and Commencement

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It all started with a team-building exercise meant to teach cooperation and communication to a group of hockey players. Picture this: Five guys lie on their backs with their feet in the air, balancing a 30-gallon bucket of water. One by one, each attempts to take off his shoes without spilling the bucket. By the end of the [roughly 9-second clip](#), someone's head gets drenched. McDonald simply recorded it and posted it to TikTok, and the rest was history.

McDonald had just come to UW-Superior at that point after transferring from the University of Nebraska Omaha. Originally from Winkler in Manitoba, Canada, he'd been playing hockey since age four and had always dreamed of playing on a Division I team. His dream came true when he spent two years on the Omaha team, but when he learned there wouldn't be a spot for him for a third year, he began to look elsewhere. He already had friends at UWS, so he decided to take the leap to become a Yellowjacket.

"It just fit me well for my last two years that I could come and play at a Division III school, be a little bit closer to home and continue on with my exercise science major," he said.

McDonald felt at home right away at UWS. He enjoyed getting to know his professors personally instead of just listening to them in a packed lecture hall.

"I like that it's really small class sizes," he said. Assistant Professor Dr. Kim LeBard-Rankila was a particularly helpful faculty member, as she helped him with many of the details of his transfer. He also enjoyed her kinesiology course.

Balancing his coursework with being a student athlete put McDonald's time management skills to the test.

"You're spending four to five hours a day on your sport. You have to just plan your school according to that," he said. Of course, he's also had to account for another time-consuming project: TikTok.

After that first viral video, McDonald picked up about 100,000 followers in a month. He began to feel pressured to keep creating popular content. He taught himself how to use video editing software, and kept posting new videos. He realized his most popular posts featured groups of people, so he was inspired to create a new account featuring ten of his closest friends from the hockey team. [The Hockey Guys](#) was born.



The new account was a hit. "One of the first videos that we had got like 700,000 views. People just enjoyed seeing that group doing different things. We're not too serious — we just like to do random stuff, just be goofy. We do funny lip synching or any dance trend that applies to our personalities."

The account seems to appeal to people, McDonald said, because it's not just about hockey. It's about a group of friends.

"We're The Hockey Guys, but our content doesn't really revolve around us playing hockey that much," he said. "It revolves more around our friendship and our personalities and who we are."

Maintaining the account can take a lot of work, with new videos being posted at least daily. But the responses the group gets from its followers make it all worthwhile, McDonald said.

"It's really special," he said. "The reactions and the messages we get from people daily, anytime we post a video, it just brings a whole new meaning to being on social media because you're literally making an impact on so many people's lives. When people tell us that, it's amazing."

McDonald plans to attend The College of St. Scholastica's graduate program for exercise physiology this fall. He also plans to stay involved with the UWS hockey team — and keep making those TikTok videos.

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