



CASE STUDY:  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-WHITEWATER  
WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL

Whitewater, Wisconsin



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*The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater is no stranger to winning championships. Since 2013, this Division III athletic program has won National Championships in football, basketball, gymnastics, and baseball. There's another program, however, that is also deserving of its many accolades: UW-Whitewater's Wheelchair Basketball Program. The men's team has captured four national titles in the past six years with a total of 12 overall since its inception in 1973 and the women's team has won three back-to-back championships (2012, 2013, and 2014) since its start in 2008.*

The personal storage lockers feature a lockable storage space for valuables.



## *In-House Engineering Makes Custom Lockers A Layup*

Wheelchair Basketball Squad takes Advantage of Spacesaver's In-House Engineers to get a Locker Room that Fits its Team and Equipment

While both wheelchair basketball teams were on their way to winning respective National Championships last year, a seemingly simple part of their athletic lives—the locker rooms the players were using—weren't attributing to that goal.

"We had old locker rooms that were really for general usage," Jeremy Lade, who serves as the Director of Wheelchair Athletics for UW-Whitewater as well as the Head Coach for the Men's Wheelchair Basketball team says. "They weren't specifically-designed to be accessible at all—let alone handicap accessible for an entire team. The men's and women's teams had to adapt to the best of their ability."

Adapting didn't seem like a fair thing to ask National Champions to do in the eyes of Greg

Swanson, Director of the Physical Plant at UW-Whitewater. He thought a perfect reward for both teams would be to redesign the lockers for the athletes, so they'd truly feel like champions in a space created for their needs. After both of those championships occurred, he turned to Spacesaver for help in making his list of wheelchair-accessible locker requirements a reality.

One of the biggest issues for the lockers rooms is that the existing lockers weren't doing the best job at storing necessary gear. The athletes couldn't use the full length of the locker, so the bottom half of the space was always crammed with uniforms, gear, and wheels—each player has an extra set of wheels for their both their basketball chairs and day chairs.



Working with John Butler, Sales Representative at Storage Systems Midwest, an authorized Spacesaver distributor, Swanson laid out his list of specifications. He wanted each player to be able to access the entire space of the locker from his or her wheelchair, and there needed to be a place—besides within the locker itself—for spare wheel storage.

Butler wasn't sure if Spacesaver's in-house Engineering department had ever worked on a solution for a wheelchair basketball team, but he had no reservations in taking Swanson's list to them. Firmly believing that storage challenges aren't standard, so solutions shouldn't be either, Spacesaver has an entire Engineering division specifically devoted to working on custom solutions. These are products that are either deviations from standard Spacesaver products or completely different products altogether, but the goal is the same—to make sure customers are able to store the items they value.

"There isn't an idea or problem that I wouldn't take to our engineering team," Butler says. "I have complete confidence that they are able to create a solution for any challenge they're given."

Starting with a standard FreeStyle® Personal Storage Locker, the engineers minimized the locker body to 46" tall, which left enough space to construct a custom rack for the athletes' extra wheels that was still accessible from a wheelchair. Within the locker body, a configurable section with hooks allows players to hang towels, clothing, and other items, and a cubby space is available to lock up personal items and keep them secure.

Lade says he personally sees a major improvement with the new locker storage. He knows first-hand how troublesome the old locker rooms were—as a previous student, Lade has worked on campus, been part of the Wheelchair Men's Basketball Team,

and has used the facility since the 1990s. "With any wheelchair basketball team, the biggest issue is space. You just have so much equipment—day chairs, basketball chairs, extra wheels, uniforms, practice gear, all kinds of stuff. As someone who is running our programs, I can say first-hand that these lockers have solved the storage issues we've had in the past."

Mike Lenzer, a Physical Therapist who has been serving students with disabilities on the UW-Whitewater campus for 25 years, agrees. "The lockers are attractive and functional, and for the students, it's very accessible and at the proper level for them to use."

The biggest endorsement comes from Michael Kipe, a History Education major at UW-Whitewater and a guard on the Men's Wheelchair Basketball Team. He hadn't seen the lockers and locker rooms before they had been replaced—but he had heard some horror stories. With the new locker rooms, he's glad someone is looking out for him and his teammates. "It's easy to move around, and we have a lot of space for all our stuff," he says. "My favorite feature is the space for the wheels. I've never seen that anywhere else and it's definitely a unique feature that is specifically for us and benefits us."

Lade sums up the locker room in a humorous way. "I think the biggest compliment is that there are no complaints about the locker room," he says. "Usually there's a few complaints, but with the new facilities, there's nothing. That's a great sign."



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Jeremy Lade

Director of Wheelchair Athletics and Head Coach for Men's Wheelchair Basketball Team, UW-Whitewater Warhawks

