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Provincial success stands out at Cowichan Secondary awards

Wrestling, basketball and field hockey teams earn recognition in shortened year

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A five-time provincial wrestling champion and three members of the senior girls basketball team that ended a decades-long drought by qualifying for their provincial tournament were among the top honourees as Cowichan Secondary School announced its 2019-20 athletic award winners in a virtual ceremony last month.

Talon Hird was named Male Athlete of the Year for the second year in a row after completing the remarkable feat of winning a provincial wrestling title five years in a row, including three for Cow High after winning the first two at Queen of Angels School.

The second award means a little more than the first, Hird admitted.

"I don't know if many people have gotten it twice," he commented. "And it was my last year, my last opportunity to shine in high school."

Both awards are still important to Hird.

"It feels good to be recognized," he said. "I've put a lot of work in. I've put hours in to accomplish as much as I can. I definitely appreciate the recognition."

Hird will attend the University of Alberta next year, wrestling for the Golden Bears while studying engineering.

"It will be really cool to be a varsity athlete on a university roster and start from the ground up again," he said. "To make a name for myself, a new challenge."

The Female Athlete of the Year for 2019-20 is Chloe Langkammer, who helped lead the school's field hockey team to another Island championship and a fifth-place finish at provincials. The award was an unexpected honour.

"It means a lot," she said. "There was a lot of really hard competition this year. I worked hard for it. Being chosen means a lot."

Langkammer concentrated her athletic endeavours on field hockey, and played on the senior team for four years. Winning the provincial championship in 2016 was the highlight of her time at Cow High.

Langkammer will attend the University of Victoria this fall, but won't be playing field hockey immediately as the Canada West Universities Athletic Association has already cancelled the fall season due to COVID-19. The team will still be able to train, and Langkammer plans to live at home and drive to Victoria three times a week to practice.

Chloe Langkammer will miss the chance to play university field hockey with her older sister, Stefanie, who was named Cow High's Female Athlete of the Year in 2014 before playing at UVic for five years.

The G.D. Corsan Scholar Athlete Award was shared by two athletes: Maxine O'Leary and Mackenzie Hall.

O'Leary, who was also the valedictorian for the Class of 2020, would have missed the entire rugby season after undergoing surgery on her knee in February. She had intended to hang around, even if she wasn't able to play, but the season was cut short, along with the rest of the school year, by COVID-19.

Success on the field and in the classroom are equally valuable for O'Leary.

"It's always important to me to be able to balance sports and academics," she explained. "I've always wanted to pursue sports after high school, but it's not a sure thing; there's always the chance of injuries, so I needed a back-up plan."

O'Leary has been recruited to play rugby at Concordia University in Montreal, where she plans on taking communication studies, but she's not certain yet if she'll be moving there right away. Fall sports, including rugby, have been cancelled by most university athletic unions across Canada, but the Quebec Student Sports Federation is still planning to go ahead. If that's still the case in September, O'Leary would prefer to be there.

"I'd rather be part of the team and start healing my knee faster," said.

The bonds among the players on the rugby team have been the highlight of O'Leary's athletic career so far.

"I've been part of the rugby team the past five years," she said. "I think it's such an amazing sport. All the girls on the team are best friends, we're so connected. It has really helped the last five years."

Hall wasn't expecting any awards, but was thrilled to be recognized for her efforts as she aimed for an athletic scholarship.

"It was really unexpected," she said. "It feels great. Hard work pays off."

There were definitely challenges along the way, Hall admitted, but they paid off in the end.

"I had to make sacrifices because of it," she said. "I had to miss out on things with friends. But it was worth it."

Hall was a huge part of the girls basketball team's run to provincials. After finishing third in the Island tournament, the Thunderbirds played a challenge game against Royal Bay for a berth at provincials. A basket by Hall sent that contest to overtime, and Cowichan took over from there.

"It was definitely something I'll remember the rest of my life," she said.

Hall will play for Vancouver Island University next year, along with T-Birds teammate Eden Funk. Hall plans to take general courses, and may go into education from there.

The Junior Female Athlete of the Year award also went to a member of the senior girls basketball team: Margo Blumel, who was also involved in junior basketball, senior volleyball, soccer and cross-country, and would have been on the track and field team if that season hadn't been cancelled. The Junior Male Athlete of the Year was Shadynn Smid, who played junior and senior basketball, and would have played soccer if there had been enough players to form a team this year.

Jessica Castle, yet another member of the senior girls basketball team, was named Sportsperson of the Year, and pointed to the squad's success as a highlight of her years at the school.

"The feeling when the buzzer went [in the challenge game] was so euphoric," she recalled. "It was such an amazing moment for the team."

Castle also participated in volleyball, basketball and soccer — which played one game before the season was cut short — and would have been in track and field. She feels it is vital to take advantage of all the opportunities available in one's youth.

"You don't need to specialize when you're young," she said.

Castle was thrilled to be honoured as Sportsperson of the Year.

"Obviously, it's a great feeling," she said. "I've worked very hard and played many sports over the years. It's nice to be recognized for the time I've put into sports."

Castle will head to UVic next year to study social sciences, with a longterm goal of getting into oceanography or earth and ocean science. She is hoping to run cross-country, and wants to play intramural sports as well.

"Sports will always be part of my life," she said. "I hope I can come back to the community and maybe be a coach myself."



Co-Scholar Athlete of the Year Maxine O'Leary. (Submitted)

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