

Student-Athlete of the Week: Mikayla Cranney's commitment to Central York Panthers, Golden Eagles is exemplary



Mikayla Cranney's prowess on and off the ice with the Central York Junior Panthers U22 Elite hockey team is matched remarkably by her diligence in and out of the secondary school classroom.

To say that the Grade 12 Honor Roll student at Aurora High School is involved in her community is an understatement. In her senior year at AHS, Cranney has been a part of the varsity basketball team, varsity hockey team, varsity volleyball team, varsity badminton team, and varsity co-ed volleyball.

She also hopes to participate in track and field and return to OFSAA, and try out for the flag football and soccer team. Cranney has also joined her high school's newly-formed Athletic Council and has helped plan school events such as the Annual Terry Fox Run, elementary sports tournaments, and the Athletic Banquet.

The veteran Panther and Golden Eagle has committed to the Queen's University Gaels in September and is also looking forward to her OWHL U22AA Elite League Championship Weekend at the end of the month.

York Girls Hockey Association President Mark Dubeau, who also serves as a coach on Head Coach Steve Dempsey's staff that has steered the 2022-23 Panthers' squad to a 28-10-5 record, has witnessed Mikayla's maturation and sees her as a leader, both in and out of the dressing room.

Coach Steve has her shout out the starting lineup in the room prior to stepping on the ice for every game. She gets involved with every Panther community initiative and represents the Juniors with spirit.

Her loyalty to the Elite hockey program has not gone unnoticed by the Panther organization, according to its President.

Mikayla is a life-long Panther. In female hockey, players are free to travel anywhere to play if they feel they can get better coaching or more development elsewhere. Her commitment to her team and the Panthers is exemplary.

Coach Dubeau also noted that Mikayla is "one of the hardest working kids out there. She has dedicated herself to not only improving everything about her game, but also brings up the level of everyone around her with the example she sets."

While reflecting on the Panthers' very successful season to date and Cranney's best moments this year with the team, Coach Dubeau settled on "mid-February when the team was going through a particularly tough stretch; she put the team on her back and got her second hat-trick of the season versus a tough Oakville squad, resulting in a 4-1 win."

"This helped lift the team to get things back on track and close out the regular season, going 6-1-1 in our last eight games."

The CYGHA President believes that what makes his Panther forward exceptional is the level of her commitment to being a student-athlete.

"Playing at the highest level of female minor hockey requires a major time commitment. The Junior Panthers have two or three practices per week, two games most weeks, off-ice weight training, and several tournaments and road trips. The Juniors also commit much of their time to work with the younger Panthers and the community in general. Her ability to manage this commitment and still keep up with her studies makes her an exceptional student athlete."

It's evident that Mikayla Cranney has made a very positive impact on the Junior Panthers program and the Aurora High School community. She took time from her second semester studies and Panther/Golden Eagle commitments to be interviewed by The Auroran:

The Auroran: What qualities did you demonstrate in your sports season to earn Student-Athlete of the Week honours?

Mikayla Cranney: "One of the biggest qualities I bring to the team is my leadership skills. Getting the team focused on the task at hand before games or with pep talks in the room or just to teammates who may need one is part of my leadership skills. Another quality is the energy I bring to the rink. Having energy on the bench and being loud is important for my team and something I'm always doing, whether it's cheering on a teammate for a good play, banging my stick on the boards, or simply yelling, "Here we go Blue!" On the more serious side of things, I've worked hard with my team to build a great team culture where we're not just a part of a team, but part of a family where we can lean on each other in times of struggle."

The Auroran: What were your key statistics and performance moments from the 2022-23 season that you are most proud of?

Mikayla Cranney: "At the beginning of the year, my team placed second overall at the Stoney Creek Showcase Tournament which had 64 teams in attendance. This is a big tournament at the start of the year which is supposed to get players scouted, but also for teams to get used to playing with each other. Our team had put in a lot of work over the summer to build chemistry with one another so it was great to see that hard work pay off with the second-place finish. Finishing the regular season second in our division is also something I am proud of as the team worked really hard to get there and keep the success of our program building as we had an excellent finish to our season last year. Not necessarily a statistic or performance moment but something that led to the success in those areas was our team culture. This is something we work hard at as a team and is not something that comes easily. Having a dressing room where everyone gets along and everyone feels welcomed is really important to me and something we were able to accomplish this year which has translated to our success on the ice."

The Auroran: How would you describe yourself as a student at Aurora High School? To which sports teams and clubs do you belong?

Mikayla Cranney: "This year I've been a part of the varsity basketball team, varsity hockey team, varsity volleyball team, varsity badminton team, and varsity co-ed volleyball. I hope to continue with the spring sports participating in track and field, looking to return to OFSAA, and trying out for the flag football and soccer team. For the first time this year, my school has formed an athletic council which I am a member of. I helped plan school events such as the Annual Terry Fox Run, hosting elementary sports tournaments, scorekeeping, and the Athletic Banquet that will take place at the end of the year. Throughout my four years of high

school, I have consistently been on the Honour Roll.?

The Auroran: What are your post-secondary plans regarding prospective academic/athletic destinations?

Mikayla Cranney: ?In the Fall, I will be attending Queen's University where I will be taking a Bachelor of Arts and playing on the Queen's women's hockey team.?

The Auroran: Who is your role model in terms of the person you admire the most?

Mikayla Cranney: ?Growing up watching Team Canada play at the Olympics, I would always watch Rebecca Johnston. Partly because she wore number 6, but also because I loved her work ethic. Every shift you could tell she was giving it her all, never giving up on a battle.?

The Auroran: How do you feel about being nominated as The Auroran's Student-Athlete of the Week?

Mikayla Cranney: ?Being nominated as The Auroran's Student-Athlete of the Week is a big honour and something I am very proud of. I've been playing sports in Aurora since I was four and have been fortunate enough to play for many Aurora teams (hockey, soccer, softball, basketball) as well as on many school teams where I have created memories that will last a lifetime. I've been playing hockey in Aurora for almost 14 years, while balancing school and working toward the goal of playing university hockey. I feel honoured to be recognized for this accomplishment.?

By Jim Stewart