CDS Student committed to play D1 hockey in Providence]

In her youth, Hannah Clarke was always ready for competition.

She was never one to ever back down from a challenge, even if that meant going up against her brother, Caleb, and his friends.

?We used to and still do play a lot of sports with and against each other. Mini-sticks, shinny, basketball, tennis, to name a few,? said Hannah.

They have a rink at the cottage and she grew up playing with Caleb, her boy cousins and her brothers' friends. They just never treated her any different. They used to put pads on her and always threw her in net. And, they never let up on the slap shot. They never treated her like a little sister or a little cousin, they treated her like one of them. Subsequently, that's what happened. She ended up trying to beat them at everything!

Having developed a love for hockey at the age of four thanks to her father and her brother, Clarke had a pre-emptive goal. It was always, to be better than Caleb and the two of them ? both in their own rights ? propelled each other to be better.

Clarke began her playing career with the Richmond Hill Stars. Playing with the boys was optimal in the beginning because it was close to home. Here, she developed life-long friends. When she finally switched over to the girl's league with the Central York Hockey Association in Aurora, it was clear to herself the differences and benefits of playing hockey with the boys.

?Playing boys hockey for her U10 And U12 years under the direction of Chris Torkoff made me a lot more physical I guess and strong. Maybe a little bit faster? I think that was the main difference,? Clarke said.

Clarke wasn't just a competitor that solely focused on one sport in her youth. Since Grade Five at The Country Day School (CDS), she was involved in volleyball, soccer, hockey, track and field and, most recently, power-lifting. Over her time at CDS, she has earned many athletes of the year awards and many MVP trophies to boot; most recently qualifying for three events at OFSAA Track & Field.

Just two years ago, Clarke joined the junior hockey program at CYGHA. A highly versatile defenceman and a talented skater, Clarke was garnering attention from post-secondary schools despite shutdowns and closures. Once everything opened back up last year, the provincial tournament came around offering a chance for scouts to attend.

The CYGHA Panthers ended up finishing fourth and Clarke also made Team Ontario and will be competing in the Canada Winter Games in PEI in late February. Throughout this process, she made contact with Providence.

?When Providence reached out, we went and visited. The facilities there are super nice, the hockey program is really good, and the coaches are really nice. It seemed like a great fit,? Clarke said.

?It's a nice school, with amazing sports facilities and about 4,000 students. Being on campus reminds me of CDS. When Clarke committed to Providence College and to their Health

Science program, her brother Caleb was extremely proud and she thanks her brother who continues to push her to be better until this day.

Clarke will aim to play professional women's hockey one day and aspires to coach the game in the future after that. She wants to give back to the game that gave her so much and to be a mentor for young girls in the future wanting to follow the same path.

Clarke is grateful for all of the opportunities that she has received through the coaches at the Central York Panther; Doug Lunney, Brittany Crago and Steve Dempsey.

Clarke is currently in Grade 12 and will be graduating CDS in 2023.

By Robert Belardi