

## Minor Bantam Jay tagged for Under-16 Team Ontario



**By Jake Courtepatte**

Claire Johnson has grown used to being the only girl on an all-boys baseball team, ever since the days of t-ball, and her debut with the Rookie Aurora-King Jays.

‘I encouraged her to make the change to softball this past season, but she refused,’ said her mother, Carmen Spiteri-Johnson. ‘Her love for baseball is very strong.’

This past weekend, the Aurora native used that passion as fuel to earn a selection to the Under-16 Team Ontario girls squad, at only 14 years of age.

An open invitation to any girls under the age of sixteen across the province, Johnson competed against approximately fifty other athletes in a six-tryout grind to claim a spot for the all-around Minor Bantam Jay.

Though mainly a first baseman, Johnson has utilized her skills at the catcher and pitcher position as well, often referred to as ‘coachable’ by team staff.

‘She listens to her coaches and tries to respond to their feedback both between and within games,’ said Spiteri-Johnson.

Her keen eye and ear for the game comes with years of experience: first picking up a baseball as a toddler, Johnson had two key mentors on the diamond at an early age in both her older brother Matt and older sister Olivia, who played baseball and softball respectively.

Referred to as ‘everyone’s little sister’, the young Johnson showed promise when she learned to pitch at the tender age of three. Team Ontario will travel to Bedford, Nova Scotia in late August to compete in the 2018 Under-16 Girls Invitational Championships, competing against the nine other provinces for the national title.

Beyond her first taste of the provincial and national spotlight, Johnson has big plans for the future.

‘Claire loves baseball and wants to play for as long as she can,’ said Spiteri-Johnson. ‘Her ultimate dream would be to get a scholarship, and maybe even see women playing in professional baseball leagues.’

A scholarship certainly seems in the books for the up-and-coming athlete: having recently graduated from grade eight at Highview Public School, Johnson was named co-Valedictorian, while earning a pair of academic awards as well as the Female Athlete of the Year, playing on seven or more sports teams between grades seven and eight.

Johnson would like to thank her teachers, Mr. Congram and Mr. Kaufman, for helping her achieve both her athletic and academic goals.