

## Pickering College Pumas capture dramatic CISAA volleyball, basketball, and hockey gold medals

The Pickering College Pumas captured three CISAA championships in dramatically-different ways over a two-day period at the end of February.

The Pumas hoisted hardware in U14 Girls' Volleyball, U14 Boys' Basketball, and Senior Boys' Hockey.

The Girls' Volleyball team bounced back from bronze last season to capture gold decisively in two straight sets as a 'Dream Team.'

The U14 Boys' Basketball team captured its gold medal in the most dramatic fashion on a buzzer-beater to edge the first place, undefeated team.

The Senior Boys' hockey team added another chapter to school history by capturing its second consecutive CISSA championship in a thrilling one-goal victory.

All in all, it was a record gold medal haul for the Newmarket independent school.

On home court at Egan House, the U14 Girls' Volleyball team defeated Hawthorn School 25-19 and 25-10 to cap off 'an incredible season,' according to Coaches Renee Merrick and Kyle Krause.

Coach Merrick assessed her young squad's performance versus Hawthorn: 'This team played together. They're talented individuals, but they were very supportive and covered for one another. We gathered momentum after winning a close first set and I could see it click in.

'I could tell after our first few games that we'd be strong. We arranged some exhibition games to play teams in higher divisions and we even beat some older teams, including our own Senior team. They became my Dream Team.'

Two of the Dream Team members, Angelina Lin and Kayla Merrick, offered insights into winning their first volleyball championship.

Lin, in her first year playing volleyball, said, 'I liked how we all supported each other and we were never discouraged.'

'The best part was celebrating with friends.'

Kayla Merrick, the team's invaluable setter, expressed her relief at improving on last season's third-place finish.

'The bronze last year made us ready for this year. Winning the plaque and medals was the best part of the championship for me.'

In the thrilling U14 Boys' Basketball final, the Pumas defeated the host Lauremont School 48-46 when Aly Jindani hit a buzzer-beater.

Pickering College Head Coach Jay Fletcher described the hectic final minute of play that culminated in Jindani's championship-winning shot.

'We were down by four with one minute to play. We managed to control the ball on our foul line with the game tied. Aly made a contested layup in front of a 6'4" player and we stormed on to the court to enjoy the frenzy.'

Coach Fletcher expressed the satisfaction of 'seeing the boys experience something like this'they'll remember it for the rest of their

lives.?

?Winning a championship is a moment for all of them to remember. It was utter joy. It was also our first U14 basketball championship at Pickering College.?

The veteran bench boss noted what it took to beat an undefeated, first place team on their home court: ?It was about high intensity defense. Ray Huang shut down their best shooter.?

Huang explained his defensive technique: ?I took away his space, closed out passing lanes, and made them make inconvenient passes.?

In addition to Huang's stellar defensive work, Coach Fletcher acknowledged the importance of ?securing rebounds by Sean Wang who played so well defensively in both games? and the scoring proficiency of ?Keith Li and Aly Jindani who were our leaders offensively.?

Huang, who clearly relished his role as the team's shutdown defender, was most satisfied with ?the cooperation of our team?we didn't start the season with the right amount of synergy, but everyone found their role and we each found our spot on the team.?

Thomas Zhang echoed his teammate's insights: ?After we won, we were reminiscing about earlier in the season when we wondered what it would be like to win. The big difference in the final was we were all very positive with one another.?

Keith Li, one of the team's top scorers, said he thought the buzzer beater championship game was ?a life experience we'll never forget that will cement us in Pickering College history.?

?It's surreal. Our coach delivered a great speech when were down by 6 with two minutes to go to help us win.?

Although the Senior Boys' Hockey team's title game was not as dramatic as the Pumas' surreal hard court moment, the on-ice Pumas made history in their own way.

Head Coach Drew MacDonald's crew captured its second consecutive CISAA championship with a razor-thin margin. The Pumas defeated St. John's-Kilmarnock School 2-1 at the Magna Centre. Ethan Robinson-Vincent and Pierce Morton?two of the top scorers in the league?tallied one goal each to give the Pumas a two-goal lead that they held until the final minute of play.

Coach MacDonald praised his team's ?strong play defensively?it was a defensive battle and we were used to having high scoring games. Our goalie Travis Poehlmann was tremendous. He let one in and, unfortunately, lost his shutout in the last minute, but he held them off. He was huge for us all year.?

The Pumas' bench boss expressed his satisfaction about winning two CISAA championships in a row: ?Winning back-to-back and establishing new school history is the best part of this for me. Winning gold medals two years in a row is special. Many of our high-calibre offensive players will be gone, but our young core will have to step up if there's going to be a three-peat.?

One of those younger Pumas who will have an expanded role in 2025-26 is Grade 10 student-athlete Michael Lin who celebrated his team's success.

?To me, the best part of winning was getting the Grade 12s a second championship for Pickering College. It meant a lot. I know Ethan was a lifer?for Josh and Luke and Jack?getting that championship in their last year was special. For the Grade 9s, Pierce and Dave were AAA guys?I was happy for them to get a high school championship.?

Lin explained this year's title deepened his connection to Pickering College.

?We knew that last year was special, but this championship seems the most important one to me because we were able to give back to the school. This leaves a lasting impression on the people who go to the school and it feels good to have added something to the school community.?

**By Jim Stewart**