



HAWKS ATHLETIC CLUB
2019 - 2020
PLAYER RECOGNITION AWARD

MASON GARDINER

The NW281 Hawks have the pleasure of nominating ***Mason Gardiner*** as the recipient of our Player Recognition Award. Mason is to be recognized for his dedication to the sport (and his team), his sense of fair play, a consistent demonstration of respect (for his teammates, his opponents, and most of all his coaches!), and his qualities as a leader, a sportsman and an athlete.

The term "hockey season" is an apt one; a hockey season can be long and subject to sudden weather changes. Periods of sunshine, where the team is winning and all is good, are punctuated by storm clouds and rain which must be weathered. This year, our season got off to a rocky start, and at times it felt like we might never win a game. In these times you can really gauge the character of your players. Because our goals were few and far between in the early going, our team established a mantra: the only goal that ever mattered was 'the next goal.' Whether we were tied 0-0, or losing by six it was the next goal that we focused on. Of all the boys on our team, Mason was the quickest to understand this lesson. After a goal against we might have boys slamming sticks, or even crying, but not Mason. As a coach I would huddle the players in front of the bench between periods and remind them to focus on the next goal – and it was one of the most gratifying moments of the season the first time I overheard Mason, unprompted, pass the same message to one of his teammates. Playing by this creed, Mason approached every shift of a hockey game as though we were one goal away from the Stanley Cup, regardless of what the scoreboard showed.

During practices Mason was consistently one of our most enthusiastic participants. Some of the players struggled with the drills devised by a rookie coach, but Mason was always patient and ready to listen. On every whistle, he set an example by racing to where I stood, stick raised, where he took a knee and waited for the next set of instructions.

We quickly adopted a tradition where we named a Player of the Game after each match, win or lose. Although we could have picked Mason most nights, he was also the first one to call out the name of who he thought was a deserving teammate. Amazing how you can raise a teammate's spirits after a loss by showing your appreciation for their hard work and effort...

Finally, I'll end on a funny note. Towards the end of our season we ran into a referee who wasn't having his best day. One of the important lessons we tried to teach our players was to show respect for the officials – and we did. After this particular game, the ref skated to our bench, and with Mason in earshot he apologized for what he thought was a poor effort. Before I could say anything, Mason piped up "don't worry ref, focus on the next game!" I laughed out loud, but it also made me realize the important lessons that can be learned at the rink.

Finally, to Mason (and all of the Hawks) I would offer this advice: don't be the weatherman. When the rain is pouring, the last thing your teammates need to hear is the forecast. Instead, be the guy who puts on his rubber boots and raincoat and jumps in the puddles. Know that storm clouds always pass, and understand that it's the *next* goal that we need to focus on.

Congratulations Mason!

Atom - NW281 Hawks
John Walker - Head Coach