

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Jon Whitelaw

BY PAULA BOON

Jon Whitelaw's name will be familiar to anyone who follows Junior A hockey.

The third-year Otter has been a team leader in total points this season and recently scored a goal in the league's annual all-star game.

However, what many people may not know is how the soft-spoken athlete has made Huntsville his home since arriving here at age 16.

Born in Barrie, Whitelaw has been playing hockey since he was four or five. He soon moved on to rep hockey, with tournaments most weekends.

"Hockey became my life," he says. "My dad coached me almost all the way through, either as assistant or head coach, so he got to share a lot of it with me."

When he was 16, Whitelaw was part of a summer team with some Huntsville players and met the Otters' coach, Tom McCarthy.

"He invited my family up to show us around the town," Whitelaw recalls. "I wasn't looking to move away from home at the time, but Tom sold it to me."

That first year Whitelaw and his good friend Mac Koopmans billeted with Steve and Belinda Saunders.

"They were supportive, warm and caring," he says. "Steve is a super fan of the team. It was

great to live with a guy like that."

Being with a friend made the transition a little smoother, but it still wasn't easy.

"You've got a lot of freedom and you have to be responsible, get your schoolwork done and do well at hockey," he explains.

That first year he was a full-time student at Huntsville High School, sometimes getting home from games at 1:30 a.m. and having to get up for school the next day.

The next season he and another friend from Barrie, Jesse McConney, lived with Tracy and Bill Muckler and their children while attending HHS part-time.

"That was a blast," he says. "I talk to Bill almost every day, and we still go there for dinner at least once a week."

At the end of the first year, Whitelaw's parents bought property in Huntsville, and last summer they began building a home here, which they moved into in December.

Explaining Huntsville's appeal, he says, "It's so outgoing and friendly. In this town, it's easy to be yourself. You don't have to try to be somebody you're not to get ahead."

Since his arrival, Whitelaw has made his share of contributions to the community. He helps coach a bantam team, spending much of his time off with them at practices and tournaments.

"That's another way I've met a lot of people. It's fun," he says. "Last year, they were thinking, 'Wow, an Otter,' but now they all know who I am so we can joke around."

He and his teammates have also volunteered with the Timbits hockey program, and one day a week he goes into an elementary school to read and help out.

"That's really fun. It makes you feel like a big deal," he says. "It's awesome to see we can make kids happy — and also show them life's not all about sports."

While Whitelaw loves hockey, he also has his eye on continuing his education. He hopes to get a scholarship to an American college so he can combine these two goals.

"I've had opportunities to pursue OHL try-outs and things, but I've never had an interest in that," Whitelaw says. "I'm driven to go the school route."

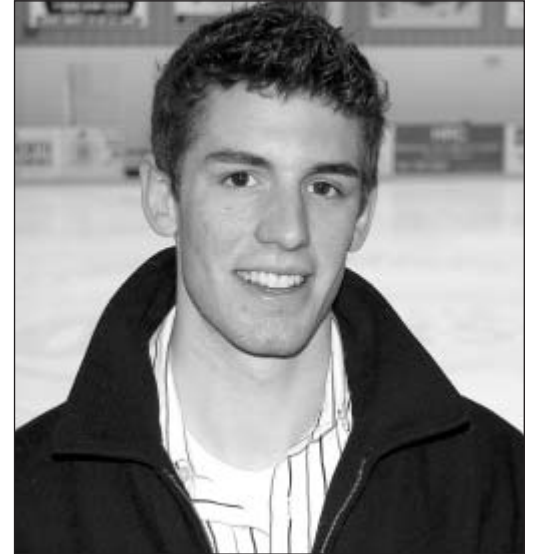
When asked about his scholarship chances, Whitelaw replies, "This year playing on such a successful team it's easy to get attention. Usually there are one or more scouts at our games. And I'm fortunate that I still have another year. If nothing comes up there's always next year."

Whitelaw is quick to say how talented his teammates are and how much he enjoys playing with them. He is also appreciative of the support shown by his parents, older sister and

girlfriend Kirsten.

And when the time comes for him to leave Huntsville, he will always come back to visit his parents and friends.

"I find this place just grows on you," Whitelaw says.



Is there someone you'd like to see profiled in this space? Please call Paula at 789-5541 or e-mail pboon@metrolandnorthmedia.com.

LETTERS

Being a billet parent for the Otters has huge rewards

I would like the opportunity to bring to the attention of residents of Huntsville the wonderful and rewarding opportunity of being a billet parent for the Huntsville Otters Junior A hockey club.

I am a single mom of three children. My oldest son is in Grade 9 and plays hockey for the bantam rep Otters. I took the plunge this year and decided to open my home to three Junior A hockey players. For those of you who are not aware, our junior hockey club is made up of several out-of-town players who pack their things and move to our town for the duration of the hockey season.

My three boys all attend high school in Grade 12. The season general runs from the end of August to possibly May (let's keep our fingers crossed).

Being a billet family simply means you open your home and welcome these boys into your family, and feed them lots of food. Athletic teenage boys can sure eat. At first I was worried about how I was going to cook for all these kids. I soon realized that it is not that difficult, just a larger quantity. The boys are required to help out with chores, etc. They are always willing to help out in any way that I ask. These boys are away from their homes, schools and families and I do my best to make them feel welcome in our family.

Anyone who says that all teenagers are a pain in the neck has never met my boys or their teammates of the Otters hockey club. The boys in my

home are polite, helpful and very respectful to myself and my children. The boys are hard workers and manage to keep good grades with their busy hockey schedules. They have been great role models for my son. They are great kids.

Where can you get great entertainment for \$11? Come on out and support our Junior A Otters at one of their games. They have proven to be an amazing hockey club, finishing the regular season first in their league. Their games are exciting and full of community spirit. The feeling you get in the arena is exhilarating. It is great entertainment right in our own town.

Watch CBC's Kraft Hockeyville next Sunday night, Feb. 17, to see our hometown compete for the Hockeyville title. The Huntsville Otters, billet families, kids and other hockey events will be featured from our town. Our town needs our votes.

In closing, I would like to thank the Otters Junior A organization for the wonderful opportunity for being a part of these boys' lives. Thanks to the team for the best hockey entertainment I have ever experienced this year so far. I would like to encourage other families to be billet parents next season. The rewards far outweigh the responsibility. Make a difference in a young man's life. Let's take it all the way, boys, and finish this season as champions.

Michelle Ball
Huntsville

Theatre staff deserve some recognition: volunteer

I read the article regarding the Algonquin Theatre's financially rewarding year. It is gratifying to know that many people and organizations work diligently for this success.

I was disappointed that no accolades were given to the staff who work beyond the call of duty to provide the necessary environ-

ment for the volunteers, local and professional performers and the Festival of the Arts to succeed.

Thank you, Huntsville, for providing a great facility.

Jim Patterson
Volunteer

Thank you, neighbours

Our cottage on Lake Vernon took quite a beating with the snow sliding off the roof, sending our deck railing to the ground, bending some vent pipes and completely closing in the front door.

Our neighbours, Paul and Chris Everist, came to the rescue, digging themselves into the cottage to check for any damage. Luckily there was no

damage and no leaks in the ceiling.

We love our cottage and are looking forward to spring with the first project being the construction of a new deck railing.

Brigitte and Alex Stehlin
Vernon Shores
Huntsville



HEALTHCARE HEROES

Huntsville District
Memorial Hospital Foundation
100 Frank Miller Drive
Huntsville, ON P1H 1H7
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Huntsville Downtown BIA

Mike Taylor of Huntsville's Downtown BIA presents a cheque for \$183,73 to Debi Davis of the Huntsville Hospital Foundation. The funds, raised by a new event in downtown Huntsville, will support the imaging department renewal project.

The BIA hosted a new shopping experience in historic downtown Huntsville in December aimed at keeping Christmas shoppers in Huntsville. Girls Getaway Weekend was a big success for the BIA. Congratulations to the members who participated and to the organizers; what a super idea!

Huntsville District Memorial Hospital Foundation continues to support:

- Huntsville District Memorial Hospital
- Fairvern Nursing Home
- Burk's Falls & District Health Centre
- Muskoka-East Parry Sound CCAC



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