

What It Means to be a Green Gael

Some would say wearing the green and white colours is a privilege, some say its a step for the next level and others say its a great junior lacrosse team. For myself, it is the greatest honour that I have ever been blessed with. The Green Gaels are a successful junior lacrosse program. They have several alumni playing in the National Lacrosse League. They are four time Founders Cup National Champions. But in my eyes, they are more than that.

Three summers ago, I was going through a very difficult time with my family after the passing of my father. I decided to stay in Oshawa and "train for hockey". My training was playing lacrosse. During that time it was an outlet for stress, it was something I loved to do. It kept my mind off stuff. My teammates at the time were aware of my situation, but they didn't know exactly what was going on. It was the week of practices right before playoffs started. Coach Brad MacArthur noticed that something wasn't right with me. I broke down right in front of him. Everything inside of me came out that night and from that moment on I truly understood what it meant to be part of the Green Gael Family. We had home floor advantage in the playoffs and we were playing against the Nepean Knights. The team I grew up playing for. We were scheduled to play Saturday night and Sunday afternoon at Rickard. The Gaels gave up home floor advantage for me and my family. The new schedule was Saturday night and Sunday afternoon in Nepean so that I was able to attend a fundraiser for my family. We won game 1. Immediately after the game, I drove with Brad to a fundraiser. I had just arrived, said hi to my family and introduced Brad to them. I was only at the fundraiser for 10 minutes when I turned around and realized my entire Green Gael family was there. All of my teammates and all of the staff showed up. I definitely did not expect that. That alone was something special. Having 22 of your brothers and 8 staff members who are like fathers to you, is the most comforting feeling. They went above and beyond. When I say above and beyond, I am not blowing it out of proportion. Its the truth. Players families and former Green Gaels all came together to help out a new member of the Gaels family. My immediate family is forever grateful for their support.

That is only one example of how special the Green Gael family is. In my next season with the Gaels my year was very short. I only managed to play in the final regular season game due to a broken arm. Everyday, everyone would always ask how I was doing, how my family was doing, if my family or I needed anything. The bond I have with the Gaels is different than most, but if any part of the Gaels family was in the same situation as I was, the Gaels would step forward and be supportive.

Being surrounded by so many amazing people and volunteers of the Green Gaels is another reason why playing for the Gaels is special. From management, to coaches, the trainers, to game day volunteers, the fans and the players; this is what makes the Green Gaels the greatest lacrosse club in the world. The bond that I created with so many of them is truly

something that I am thankful everyday for. Members of the Green Gael family knows that its the dedication of everyones time and effort put into the team to make it so successful. The atmosphere around the arena is something truly amazing. Going to practice is like one big family gathering. Everyday the players put in hard work to make each other better. They create bonds that are untouchable all while having the time of their lives together. Before the hard work starts on the floor, players are already in the dressing room joking around and sharing laughs with each other. From my time with the Gaels, I still don't remember a practice that was easy. The inner competitions the players have with one another on the floor is what makes the Gaels so competitive. They put in the work that needs to be done everyday.

A Green Gael is not only part of the lacrosse team, they are part of the community. So many past and present Gaels are representing the pride and tradition of the club. Whether its coaching, being a referee, volunteering and dedicating their time to promote the wonderful game, the Gaels have always given back. Ive heard the term bleed green several times. For most people its just a saying, but for me its the way I live my life. In my words, the saying "bleed green" means a person who will go above and beyond to make a difference in not only the lacrosse world, but life in general. The entire Green Gaels family bleeds green no matter what. When you become a part of the family, you are not forced into it, but you are welcomed into the family with open arms. There is no question this is another reason why the Gaels family is so special.

Last season, my last year as a Green Gael player, was a rollercoaster of emotions. As I said before, the greatest honour of my life was being a Green Gael. As a kid who grew up playing for the Nepean Knights, to play for the Gaels would've been a dream come true. Before joining the Gaels, if you told me I would be the captain of the team, I probably would have laughed and said in my dreams. The Gaels were always one of the best teams in the province growing up. After being part of the team for two seasons, I was named team Captain. If being a Green Gael was my greatest honour in life, then what would team captain of the Gaels be? To this day, I still cannot put the words together to describe the honour of being the captain. When I look back at my captains Davin Lindsay and Ben Pitchforth I consider myself lucky. Why lucky? Well, they were the guys who led the team, I was like a younger brother to them. They were everything you'd ask for in a big brother. Being the captain, I was like the big brother to all of the guys. Well a big, little brother to Zach Bryant anyways. As the leader of the players, coaches, management, trainers, fans, volunteers, and the entire Green Gael family, there are no words that I can use to describe my feelings. It was just such an incredible honour. I remember how hard it was last season step away from a Founders Cup run. I didn't know how to tell my coaches or teammates. My reasons for stepping away were strictly because I wanted to be injury free going into my first season of professional hockey. When I look back at things, it was an unfortunate situation, but I had full support from the players and coaches. Having the support of my Green Gael family is the best feeling in the world.

Yes we lost in the 2016 Founders Cup Final; which really sucks. Especially with the group of guys we had in the room. We deserved to a better fate. Regardless of the outcome, we are Green Gaels. We bleed green. We are a family.

Families overcome tough times. Losing sucks, but its part of life. The Green Gaels are champions at life. I may not be a player anymore, but I am now a proud alumni. When people hear names like Jim Bishop, Doug Luey, Ken Johnston, and Brad MacArthur they think of the Green Gaels. One day when people say Will Petschenig, I hope they think of the Green Gaels. I am the person I am today because of this family. I am a Gael for life. A small part of the greatest family in the world.

FHPT,

Will Petschenig