

Captain of New Canaan Country School's Hockey Team 'Led by Example'

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New Canaan Country School ninth grader Nina Stoops is not sure which came first, walking or skating. She does however know with certainty that her lifelong love for the game of ice hockey was established in her earliest years.

“I have vivid memories of those Learn to Skate classes, when the entire Kindergarten went down the hill from the classroom to the rink,” she said. “I get the same feeling today as I did then, just excited to be on the ice, with my friends, doing what I love. It’s still my happy place.”

Nina, a Darien resident and the daughter of Christina and Bill Stoops '78, plays defense on the Country School girls' varsity ice hockey team, which has just concluded its season.

Nina was one of two student-athletes selected to offer reflections at the end-of-term Upper School (Grades 7-9) sports assembly, held on campus Feb. 26.

— *This is an announcement, with minor changes by Darienite.com, from New Canaan Country School.*

“When I was deciding what I was going to say today, I kept coming back to all of you and what this team has

meant to me. When we come together, our skills collectively fall into place which leads to a team flow on the ice and stronger bonds off the ice,” she said.

“Nina is a terrific player, a talented skater with great drive, and she was an anchor on our defense this year,” said Upper School teacher and Girls’ Varsity Hockey Coach Scott Lilley.

“She was both instrumental in our team’s success and positive and resilient in our losses,” Lilley said. “She is smart and disciplined, and it helped us tremendously to have her break up opposing teams’ offensive rushes, and to keep traffic away from the front of our net. Nina was also comfortable in transition, moving as a player on defense up the ice to become a scoring threat on offense. She was, in fact, one of our leading scorers over the course of the season.”

A play-maker who was twice selected for all-tournament honors at the Upland Invitational, Nina is as valued for her enthusiasm and mentoring skills as she is for her ability to find the back of the net.

“Nina has been with us on the varsity girls’ team for three years, and while she has always been a positive contributing member, she has really grown as a player and leader during that time. It’s always exciting to see that kind of development as a coach,” Lilley said. “This year, Nina was elected by her peers to the position of captain, where she led the team by example with her positive attitude and play. The girls simply followed her lead.”

“One of the things I like best about playing hockey, is that we get to do it as a team,” said Nina. “I want everyone on my team to score, not because I want to crush the opponent, but because I want my friends to experience the rush of a goal, and love the game the way I do. Hockey at NCCS is really fun. I want us all to be having a great time.”

A three-sport athlete, Nina also plays varsity field hockey and lacrosse, but admits that ice hockey is her primary focus.

“I spend seven-and-a-half hours a week playing, another hour or two practicing my shots in my driveway and the rest of the time, I’m just thinking about it,” she said.

Nina also competes on an elite team outside of school, the U-14 Tier 1 Ice Cats, which placed 2nd at the state’s championship Sunday, Feb. 24. She plans to continue her athletic pursuits in secondary school next year.

“I’ve been skating on the same ice, with mostly the same kids, since I was really little,” said Nina. “The girls on my teams are my best friends, they are my support system. I have loved it and now I’m ready and excited for whatever comes next.”

New Canaan Country School is a co-ed, independent, day school for students in Pre-K (ages 3 & 4) through

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Grade 9. Located on a 75-acre campus in New Canaan, the school provides transportation to families living throughout Fairfield County. For more information about the school or the school's athletic program, visit: www.countryschool.net.