SPORTS

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Water polo players choose gold medal game over grad

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Two St. Albert teens skipped their high school graduation to help their water polo team win gold at nationals.

Nandor Voros and Emil Loberg, both Grade 12 students at Paul Kane High School, play on the 18U men's team with the Edmonton Tsunamis Water Polo Club. From June 5-7, they played five hard-fought games at the National Finals in Calgary, ultimately helping their team earn its first national championship.

The Tsunamis played five close games throughout the tournament, including the gold medal game against Team Saskatchewan on June 7. The score was tied 3-3 at halftime, but with only a few minutes left in the game, the Tsunamis pulled ahead. They held on to win 9-8, securing the title.

"I'll never forget that feeling at the end, when this final buzzer sounded, and we just looked at each other, and we're like, this actually just happened, and then all the coaches hopped in," Voros said.

"It was a grind of a game, like it was a very hard one, lots of swimming. You know, it's the gold medal game. It's what you expect, very tiring, but that feeling at the end is something that I don't think anything will compare to that."

While they brought home gold, they missed a significant milestone that marked the end of their high school years. However, for Voros, choosing the gold medal game over graduation was a simple decision.

"For me, it was a pretty easy choice," Voros said. "This group, this team — I've known some of those boys since I was like 10. But the team itself, we've been training together for four years now, and we've become so close and such good friends that it was a choice that I knew was so easy, because I just love them all so much.

"That's my team, and winning nationals with them means way more to me than graduation."

However, the decision wasn't quite as easy for Loberg. He said he initially planned to try to make it back for graduation and had even considered skipping the tournament at one point, but as the tournament progressed, the decision became clear.

"Just how the weekend unfolded and how everything was so close," said Loberg. "It was a fight for everyone, and the emotions I saw in other guys, it just made it clear that the only option was to stay."

Both teens will continue to play water polo next year.

Voros is headed to Salem University in West Virginia, where he'll play water polo and study sports science, while Loberg has been invited to return to Sweden to play with the national team.

Voros and Loberg attributed their success to dedication to the sport and extensive practice.

"I'd say it's like every sport; it all depends on you," Loberg said. "If you put in the work and you want it in any sport, you could go far. I just think with water polo and all these smaller sports, odds are in your favour a lot more, and then there's the community, because it's a small sport, everyone's really tight knit."

Marina Radu-Johnson, the team's coach, said she has been with the group for four years now and has trained them to be ready for high-performance water polo.



SUPPLIED/Photo

18U Edmonton Tsunamis water polo team after winning gold at nationals.

"Once they get to the 17U, 18U age, they're starting to look to be listed to national teams," she said.

"And if they don't have that instilled in them already, then coaches are doing a disservice to them. So, I've always really tried to push that, you know, that Olympic dream, so to speak, but to have that work ethic behind them as well."

Radu-Johnson said when Varos and Loberg were playing for nationals, she would watch the games and cheer them on.

"Each time Nandor played a game internationally with Team Canada, I watched, I cried, I cheered them on, and same thing for Emil," she said.

"He went home and played for Sweden this past year in a junior competition. Same thing. I watched all his games, super proud that he was able to showcase how strong we are here in Edmonton."

The win was bittersweet for Radu-Johnson; she said the team's success also marks the end of an era, as seven players, including Voros and Loberg, will graduate.

"We made it to the top, but now we're losing also because we're losing these players and their mentorship for the next generation coming up," said Radu-Johnson.

"So, it's bittersweet. I'm so happy. I'm so proud of them, because I see day-to-day what they put into their training and their goals and their dreams, and that they finally were able to have that come to fruition is a really proud moment for me." ■

Bulldogs look forward with new coach

GARRET KRYZANOWSKI
Special to the Gazette

The Bellerose Composite High School football program is looking to continue its winning tradition with the hire of its new head football coach.

Former quarterback Devin Desormeau, 25, was named the new head coach of the Bellerose Bulldogs last month.

Desormeau, who had a previous coaching stint at Bellerose during his student teaching placement in the fall of 2023, is excited to be back with the Bulldogs.

"I was incredibly excited and grateful for the opportunity," said Desormeau.

"The announcement gave me a meaningful chance to reconnect with former coaches and teammates who've been part of my football journey. That really meant a lot to me."

Desormeau's coaching history includes more than just the Bulldogs, expanding into many Football Alberta programs, starting with the U16 Team Alberta at the 2023 Summer Games, and currently with the U18 Team Alberta Men's Team as a quarterbacks coach.

With all of his experience, Desormeau doesn't think his relative youth should be a topic of conversation.



SUPPLIED/Photo

New Bellerose Head Coach Devin Desormeau coaching U18 Team Alberta at the 2024 Football Canada Cup in Regina, Sask. last summer.

"My age isn't something I focus on," said Desormeau.

"What matters most is building trust with the players. If they know you care about them as people and see that you're committed to helping them improve, they'll buy in and respond to you as their coach."

Desormeau knows this trust extends to more than just on the field.

"As a teacher in the school, my top priority is seeing our players succeed in the classroom and grow into positive contributors to the community," said Desormeau.

As the Bulldogs get ready for the season this coming fall, Desormeau is not only confident in himself, but his coaching staff as well.

"We've brought back every assistant coach from last season, including Darryl Draudson," said Desormeau.

"Their combined experience, and long-standing connection to the program provide valuable continuity as we continue to build moving forward."

Coming off a championship season, the Bulldogs are looking to continue their successful run, and Desormeau is ready to embrace all of it.

"I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to lead a program with such a strong football legacy," he said.

The Bulldogs training camp starts in the middle of August, with the season starting at the end of August.

You can visit the Bulldogs website for more information on their upcoming season. ■