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LOCAL SPORTS

They've been under his tutelage for a long time

By **Jon Boroshok / Correspondent**
Wednesday, March 10, 2004

The dream always ends the same way - a young boy scores the goal that clinches the Stanley Cup, the holy grail of hockey. The reality ends with no miracle on ice or tickertape parade, but for four Littleton High School seniors, it's been anything but anticlimactic.

Matt Coole, Pat Feehan, Joe Graham, and Mike Kanniard have been skating since they were about five years old. Now 17 and 18, they are the first graduating class of the Littleton varsity ice hockey program that started four years ago.

"They're a very special group of seniors," said Head Coach Howie Schneider. "They're special for me because I've been involved with the high school for four years, and had coached all these kids in youth hockey. They're my son's peers, and I saw them a lot outside the rink."

Hockey has connected their young lives for years - Schneider also coached a 5-year-old Feehan, and also coached Coole, Graham, and Kanniard when they were 8-year-old Mites.

Coole, Feehan, and Graham served as team captains this season. When asked to describe each player, Schneider had no trouble offering details that come from more than just four seasons as their high school coach.

"Pat Feehan was probably strongest player on the team," said Schneider. He was a Central Massachusetts all-star as a freshman and junior. Feehan injured his back playing football this year, but hockey is really his sport. Schneider said, "The team was lucky to have him this year. He made it back for last eight games." In four seasons, Feehan scored 46 goals and had 44 assists for 90 points.

As Littleton's second all time points leader, Feehan looks back fondly on his high school career. His said his best moment was "either scoring my first hat trick against Groton-Dunstable in freshman year, or our first year in the playoffs. We went to the second round."

Feehan said his worst moment was during sophomore

SCHOOL SPORTS

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Littleton/Bromfield senior ice hockey players are, in the front row from left, Pat Feehan (captain), Mike Kanniard, and in the back row: Matt Coole (captain), Terrance Sullivan, Joe Graham (captain), Joe Huber, and Myles Blain (captain). - Courtesy photo by Howie Schneider

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year, when he had difficulties balancing athletics and academics. He came back stronger in both areas junior [Independent](#) year, and said the experience taught him to do better in school, a lesson he plans to carry with him next year he hopes to enroll as a freshman at Dean College. He is also considering playing for a junior hockey team.

Matt Coole says his greatest hockey moment was three years ago, when the team went to the second round of the playoffs. "The amount of students that showed up to watch us play hockey was amazing," said Coole. Joe Graham agreed. "We had great fans."

Coole said his worst moment on ice was a junior season loss to Wachusett, which he blames in part to blowing coverage on his opponent.

"I had it in my head that I wasn't going to let that happen this year," he said. Finding strength in adversity, the resolve was successful. Another tough moment was breaking his collarbone during his freshman year.

"I was more in emotional pain that I wouldn't be able to finish the season, and that hurt more than breaking any bone," said Coole. "Just the fact that you couldn't play, and can't help your team out."

Schneider called Coole a "quintessential athlete and all around great guy. He's the funniest guy I've ever met in the locker room or on ice. He keeps everybody else loose." Schneider said that with Feehan out injured, Coole stepped up to be the true offensive leader on the team and did whatever was asked of him.

This fall, Coole will be a freshman at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. "He's an excellent student too," said Schneider. Coole ends his high school hockey career with 20 goals and 55 assists for 75 points, and was a Coughlin Conference And Central Mass All Star. He hopes to keep playing intramural hockey.

Mike Kanniard totaled 10 goals and 6 assists for 16 points in a high school career interrupted by injuries. Kanniard follows in the NHL tradition of an antagonistic player - a Ken Linesman or P.J. Stock type - not big in stature, but big in heart and hitting. "Mike is the sparkplug of this team, said Schneider. "Although he's not the biggest kid, he always finds the biggest kid on the other team to go after. We always joked that we had two systems - the team's and Mike's. He created chaos for the other team."

A second line center last year, his senior season was cut short by an off-season shoulder injury that he re-injured playing soccer. Kanniard made it back for last five games.

Schneider called Graham the hardest worker on the team. "If everybody worked as hard as Joe does, the team would be that much better," he said. "Joe is a true leader comes to play every night."

The defenseman was a Coughlin Conference All Star, scored 7 goals and provided 19 assists for 26 points in his years on the team.

Asked to reflect on in what he will miss the most about playing hockey at Littleton High School, he said, "You just know everything about everybody's life when you walk in the locker room. You ask them how their family is, what they did - it's more that than the sport, than playing on the ice. You can play for any team, but you've played with the same kids since seventh grade."

Graham plans to go to college next year, and is looking at UMass, UMass-Lowell, Assumption, Wentworth, University of Vermont, and Northeastern. He also hopes to play intramural hockey.

The players agreed with Schneider about the best moment this season.

"There were lots of moments, but as a group, the last regular game and last home game stand out," Schneider said. "It was senior night. We beat an extremely strong Westboro team. They were undefeated in the conference, and had beaten us earlier in the year. Our seniors stood on their heads that night."

The players expressed pride in making a name for Littleton against some of the best and more established teams from central Massachusetts. The win against Westboro propelled the team into the state playoffs once again, where they lost to a tough Shrewsbury team.

"The end of season is always hard, and the last game is always a loss unless you win it all," said Schneider. "This year was especially hard because of all the seniors. I feel very close to all of them. Losing that last game was toughest because it's all done."

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