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A man and his boat

By: Stan Hudy , Community News

SARATOGA SPRINGS - Shenendehowa junior Patrick Ballantyne loves sports. He's always been around them, competed in a few during his younger years, but it is the sport of rowing that has allowed him to become his own man.

Ballantyne has been a part an important part of Plainsmen squads since the sixth-grade.

He was a manager for the Shenendehowa ice hockey team for two years before turning his eye, and his Canon camera, to the field. For the past three years he has taken sports photographs for ice hockey, lacrosse as well as football for his high school and its newspaper, The Shen Pen.

He wanted to compete, just as he did during his freshman lacrosse season and his time on the ice in the Clifton Park Arena in youth hockey.

Rowing became that venue.

"All my friends in different sports wanted me to come to games and take pictures," Ballantyne said. "I feel that I have more talent for crew and fell that I fit in."

He started rowing in the eighth grade in the fall, racing for the past five years in head races. This is his first year rowing in the spring season.

"I get nervous at times," Ballantyne said. "At the Head of the Fish I was 10 meters from the dock and my oar lock was on the wrong way. It caused me to flip, I was done."

The entry into chilly Fish Creek disqualified him from the annual fall 2-1/2 mile race, but didn't dampen his spirits.

"It's like riding a bike," Ballantyne said. "You just have to get used to it."

In a community where sports participation is almost an expected activity, his parents indulged his foray into rowing.

"It was hard for him to get an opportunity to play high school hockey," Suzy Ballantyne said. "Only 18 or 20 kids make the team and they have to be very good. In rowing, everyone gets the opportunity."

"The kids are together five days a week and they usually get together Friday nights," his mother said. "They're a nice group of kids and the parent participation is incredible."

Crew has also allowed Ballantyne to put his size and strength to work in his single, after he was properly fitted.

"I wanted to row in the fours and the eights, but I had to move my shoes from boat to boat," Ballantyne said. "I wear a size 15, so they had to special order them."

Now with his own Wintec at his disposal, Ballantyne controls his own destiny in both the fall and spring seasons.

"Last year I wanted to get a single," Ballantyne said. "It was a choice, get single or get a drivers license. I decided on a single over a car. I'll get a car soon."

Ballantyne earned a silver medal two weeks ago in the freshman/novice single, eligible because this was his first stint rowing during the 1,500-meter sprint season.

"It felt good to get a medal for my first sprint race," Ballantyne said. "I like the sprints, they're hard, but I like the speed and short distance."

He learned some valuable lessons from his 1,500-meter race on the Mohawk River, putting them to practice on Fish Creek.

"I cut down my time by one minute today," Ballantyne said about his efforts at last weekend's New York State Scholastic Rowing Association regatta. "It keeps me wanting to pull even harder."

"Next year I'll have even more experience," Ballantyne said. "At sectionals I looked out of the boat too much, it messed up my set (boat's balance)."

His season isn't over, the Shenendehowa junior now has his sites set on competing at the Canadian Henley followed by another fall and spring season of rowing.

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