

Kiroplis looks forward to serving time at Penn

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

One of the first tasks for hockey player Irene Kiroplis when she begins studies at Penn State University next fall is to find a decent place to consume her pre-game meal.

Growing up in Georgetown, the 17-year-old could always rely on her mom Effie's beloved eggs Benedict to get fuelled up before a big game at the Kiroplis's popular family restaurant, the Norval Pancake Factory.

But as the oldest of four hockey-playing siblings in a tightly knit Greek-Canadian household, with dad Chris wearing out the family's mini-van in his efforts to not miss a game or practice, Kiroplis credits her work ethic in landing her a full scholarship to skate for the Nittany Lions' newly established women's varsity team.

And there's no secret recipe, either. She works out with elite athletes such as NHLers John Tavares and P.K. Subban at the Athletic Training Centre in Mississauga and there is always her part-time duties waiting back at the restaurant.

"If I don't have hockey or homework to do, I'll be at the restaurant working," said the 5-foot-8, right-handed shooting defender, who will major in kinesiology at Penn State.

"All the bussing tables helped with my upper body strength because of the plate lifting I had to do. And the dishwashing played a part too. (But) to compete at a higher level, I needed to develop a strength-training program and working with (owner/founder) Richard Clark at ATC has really helped a lot."

Penn State women's head coach Josh Brandwene said that Kiroplis's skating ability stood out when she was scouted playing for the under-19 Brampton Canadettes of the Provincial Women's Hockey League. An honours' student at Christ the King, Kiroplis will major in kinesiology and may follow in the career paths of her uncles by becoming a physiotherapist.

"Conditioning and versatility set Irene apart," Brandwene said.

"She is tireless, very smart both with and without the puck, and excels at both ends of the ice."

In just their second year in the NCAA Division I loop, Penn State's women have experienced some growing pains, posting a 3-12-2 record this season. They play in the just-opened Pegula Arena, named after billionaire Nittany Lion grad Terry Pegula, who also owns the NHL's Buffalo Sabres.



IRENE KIROPLIS

Penn State was recently named as one of the top three college towns in the U.S. by the American Institute of Economic Research and Kiroplis said that her two visits to Happy Valley made her decision on her post-secondary school destination an easy one.

"I know it sounds funny, but when we visited the campus, I could just see myself jogging there," she said.

"That was a really big criteria for me, the social part of it. It really seems like the right fit because of the academics and with Penn State being such a well-known sports school. I love the saying, 'We Are Penn State,' because it describes exactly how I feel. It reminds me of Georgetown so much. It's big in area, but it has a small-town homey feel, where you know everybody and everybody's a part of something."

She's been named athlete of the year at CtK in Grades 9-11, also excelling at cross-country running and field lacrosse. With no varsity girls' hockey at CtK this year, she plans to mix things up by trying squash, swimming and track & field this year. She also belongs to a traditional Greek dancing club.

On the ice, Kiroplis feels she's ready to make the jump to Division I college hockey. Last month, she traveled to Happy Valley to take in a Nittany Lions' home game and while she was taken aback by the pace and physical demands at that level, can't wait to join the fray next fall.

"Girls' hockey isn't contact, it's accidental contact, but there's nothing really accidental about it," she noted, smiling wide.

"Speed kills and that's something I'd like to continue to improve on. I really like the nitty gritty, just get in there and forecheck and backcheck. That's the main part of my game."

Jr. A Raiders looking to make up ground

Having reached the mid-point of the Ontario Junior Hockey League's regular-season schedule, the Georgetown Raiders are looking to make up some ground in the final couple of months of the 2013-14 campaign.

The 14-11-2 Raiders defeated the visiting Hamilton Red Wings 5-2 on Saturday night for their eighth victory in their past dozen starts.

Rookie Andrew Court, Liam Board, Tyler MacPherson, Richard Court and Brendan Jacome found the net for Georgetown and captain Steve Hladin was named the contest's first star with two assists.

Local resident Michael McNiven continued his strong run of play in goal with a 22-save effort to improve the 16-year-old's record to 9-2-0 this season with the Raiders.

Georgetown sits in third place in the OJHL's West Division, seven points behind front-running Buffalo and five back of second-place Milton, although the Raiders hold games in hand on both teams.

After a relatively light schedule in November, the Raiders have a busy stretch starting at home Saturday against Lindsay (7:30 p.m. puck drop) with four games in five days.

They'll also visit Burlington Sunday afternoon, Buffalo Tuesday night and then play host to former Raider head coach James Richmond and the Aurora Tigers Wednesday at the Alcott Arena beginning at 8 p.m.

In roster moves, the team assigned winger Michael Courvoisier of Acton to the Guelph Jr. B Dominators, while also acquiring Nicholas Palumbo from the Mississauga Chargers.

The 19-year-old Palumbo is a 5-foot-9, 165-pound forward who had five goals and eight assists in 26 games this season with the Chargers and had an assist in his Georgetown debut Saturday.

The OJHL's All-Star teams were announced this week and three members of the Raiders were selected to the South/West Division roster that will play at the Central Canada Cup tournament Dec. 27-29 in Terrebonne, Que.

Hladin, who is tied for sixth in league scoring with 17 goals and 24 assists, was chosen, along with second-year blueliner Liam Clare of Georgetown and athletic trainer/equipment manager Andrew Groombridge.

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