

## Chemistry pays off for volleyball duo

By **EAMONN MAHER**  
Staff Writer

In just their first year together as a beach volleyball duo, Georgetown's Jake MacNeil and partner Andrew Richards of London still had a decided advantage over their opposition.

The 15-year-olds often played against competition at least a year older than they were, yet they managed to earn gold medals at both Ontario and Canadian doubles' championships this past summer.

Their advantage? In order to cut down on Richards' traveling, he stayed with MacNeil's family in Georgetown through the summer and they'd commute to Toronto three or four times each week to train, along with playing in tournaments almost every weekend.

"(Andrew's) an awesome partner and by the end of the year we knew everything about each other, especially where we were going to be out on the court," said the Grade 10 Georgetown District High School student.

"It makes a big difference because chemistry means a lot and there are just two of us out there, so if someone's upset or not playing their best, you've got to have your partner's back."

The two met at tryouts for the Ontario Summer Games last year. Following MacNeil's third-place finish at that tournament and a silver at the nationals with a different partner, the goal for 2011 was nothing short of gold and the more reserved Richards seemed the ideal complement the 6-foot MacNeil's boundless energy in the sand.

"The first thing you notice about Jake is his passion and fiery spirit on the court. He doesn't take defeat lightly or easily," said his coach with the under-16 national development team, Georgetown native Duncan Cairns.

"He's absolutely intense and plays on the edge but in a good way, because he's able to maintain his composure in the big points and not get too high. Jake isn't the tallest kid out there but he plays much bigger than his size. We talk about that in our pre-match meetings that you can't win the match in the first point of the game. You have to

maintain that mental focus throughout and we saw that when Andrew and Jake came back to win three times at the nationals, and that's maturity that you don't see in many 15-year-olds."

The tandem didn't drop a set all weekend in capturing the Ontario Volleyball Association under-15 title and even placed fifth at the under-18 provincials, so they decided to up the ante by entering the under-16 division for the nationals at Ashbridges Bay.

They only lost one match in the preliminary round to qualify for the quarterfinals and met the division's number-one seeded team. After dropping the first game in a grueling 33-31 thriller, MacNeil and Richards took the next two games 21-18 and 15-11.

Another tough three-set win over a Quebec team followed in the semis, putting them against a Mississauga team.

That match also went to the limit before MacNeil and Richards prevailed 18-16 in the tiebreaking set.

"To lose in the finals the year before, winning it this time was an awesome feeling because that was our goal at the start of the year," MacNeil added.

Along with being coached by Cairns, who has represented Canada at the world championships, MacNeil and Richards were invited to train all summer at the Elite Beach Volleyball Academy in Toronto under Hernan Humana, who guided Mark Heese and John Child to a bronze medal at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

"We're still a young team and we want to develop so it's not like a lot of teams where one person blocks and the other defends. You really don't know what your strengths and weaknesses are going to be three or four years from now. It's good to try to develop everything about your game from year to year."

MacNeil gave up playing AAA hockey this year to concentrate more on volleyball. He's a member of the GDHS Rebel squad that's off to a 5-1 start in the Halton Tier I league and was on the Georgetown Impact club team that won the organization's first-ever boys' provincial championship in the spring.



The beach volleyball team of Jake MacNeil from Georgetown (left) and London's Andrew Richards earned Ontario and Canadian championships in the sand this summer as 15-year-olds.

Submitted photo

## Sure-shot

Ellyssa Brooks (20) of Christ the King's Jaguars hit a difficult running shot for a basket during a Halton high school junior girls' basketball contest against Milton's Bishop Reding Royals last week in Georgetown. The Royals also had their shooting touch working well and reeled off 16 straight points in the fourth quarter to break open a close game, finishing up with a 58-33 victory. In the senior game, Bishop Reding's Marie Maranan had 36 points in a 57-38 triumph over the Jags, who received 14 points from Cierra Henry.



Photo by Eamonn Maher

## Hit on Harris sparks suspension

The Ontario Hockey League handed out its lengthiest suspension so far this season last week for a mid-ice collision that injured Georgetown's Jacob Harris.

The 16-year-old Harris, a rookie centre with the Sudbury Wolves, was blindsided by London Knights' defenceman Kyle Flemington while skating through the neutral zone without possession of the puck during the first period of a game at London John Labatt Centre on Sept. 30.

The 5-foot-11, 180-pound Harris

left the game and missed the Wolves' next two contests, while the 6-foot-7, 230-pound Flemington—a repeat offender—received a five-minute major and game misconduct for the hit.

Flemington's 15-game ban is the lengthiest of the four double-digit suspensions levied by the OHL through the first two weeks of the regular season.

Harris, a second-round draft pick of Sudbury in the spring, had played a regular shift in the Wolves' first three regular-season games.

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