

# Great debate awaits some student-athletes

BY JOHN CUDMORE  
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Eyes wide open.

It is sound advice for any high school student-athlete on the cusp of the biggest step in their lives.

It's not every student-athlete who gets the chance to ponder an NCAA scholarship to an American school.

It can be glitzy and glamorous from a distance. Up close, it can have a whole other texture.

Fact is, there are far more oppor-

tunities available to high school students in the Canadian Interuniversity Sport than in the NCAA.

In many cases, however, it comes down to personal preference.

Keep in mind the American approach to athletics is as much about business and results. Jobs, careers and reputations are won, held and lost due to on-field performance and results.

The reality is a school expects a return on its investment, which can easily surpass \$100,000 over a four-

year period.

To some student-athletes, the pressure of that expectation, combined with an aggressive atmosphere they have never before experienced, simply becomes overbearing and too much to handle.

"It's virtually a seven-days-a-week job, especially at the big schools and lots of kids can't handle it," says Larry Bone, a retired high school teacher whose business Athletes Teaching Athletes, has prepared student-athletes includ-

ing Stouffville Spirit players for SATs, the NCAA's entrance exams. "Thirty hours of school and another 20 hours on the court or training, that's a lot of energy to expend."

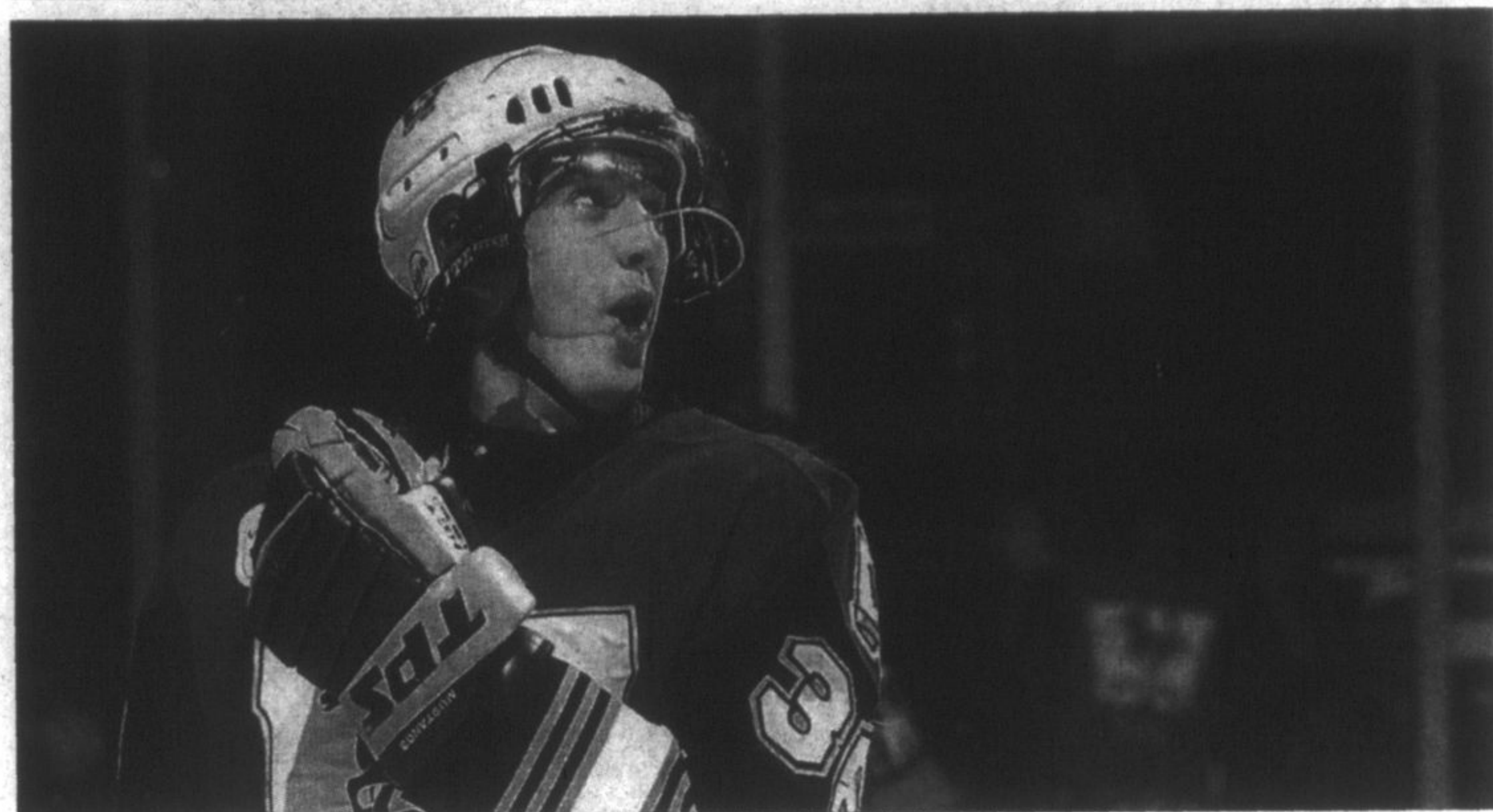
Factors that may discourage a student-athlete from fulfilling a four-year term, include failing marks, homesickness, competitiveness and the skill level.

Vague promises, coaching changes or a lack of challenge or success in the classroom can alter the initial agreement.

But there is nothing more humbling for a star athlete to arrive at his or her new school only to discover the small-fish, large-pond syndrome is in play.

"Part of the adjustment is going from star status to just another one of the guys or gals," says Bone. "There's so many issues for university-bound kids. Some decisions are made for the wrong reasons.

"Unless you're really comfortable with it, education should be the primary purpose. It's a crapshoot."



Jesse Boucher's NCAA experience lasted a little beyond Christmas of his freshman year.

## Boucher survived NCAA to flourish in Canada

Jesse Boucher was a late bloomer. He didn't grow up playing minor hockey dreaming of an NCAA scholarship or being selected in the OHL draft.

Overlooked in the OHL draft, he didn't even try out for the Markham Waxers Jr. A team until he was 18.

But as he put up offensive numbers, he became a hot commodity in his second season with the Ontario Provincial Jr. A club.

"In my draft year, I was playing double-A hockey in Markham," recalled Boucher, also a member of his Brother Andre Cardinals high school team. "It never crossed my mind. I didn't have the skill level."

Undrafted in the OHL, he did not escape the attentions of the University of Miami of Ohio Red-Hawks.

He eventually accepted a full-ride scholarship.

The NCAA experience lasted

a little beyond Christmas of his freshman season.

"It definitely didn't turn out as I expected," said the 24-year-old Markham resident, now in his fourth year at the University of Western Ontario in London. "I don't really know what happened, it just didn't pan out the way I thought it would."

The coach, who had recruited Boucher for more than a year, left the school soon after he signed.

After starting out playing every second game or so, Boucher's playing time steadily declined to the point where he was informed shortly after Christmas he likely wouldn't play again for the remainder of the season.

"I didn't really get the opportunity I thought I would," said Boucher, who returned home to join the OHL's Kitchener Rangers where he helped win a Memorial Cup title. He also landed a first-rate educational package.

Boucher is in his fourth year at the University of Western Ontario where he is studying criminology and psychology while playing for the Mustangs.

"My biggest regret is I took the first offer even though I would later be talking with some very good schools," he recalled. "I felt the heat and bit on the offer. I had no idea (the coach) was going to leave and, at the time, I didn't think anything of it. It didn't register that it would affect me."

He's not bitter, although perhaps a bit wiser. In the end, it worked out well for Boucher.

"I have nothing bad to say about the NCAA," he said. "I don't regret going, only that I (decided) so early. My advice is to keep an open mind."

"I didn't know any better at the time. They just put the heat on me, said they had others waiting to see what I would do, and it worked."

## Volleyball star went Orange with college scholarship

Kacie MacTavish wanted the best competition she could find on a volleyball court. That ended up being Syracuse University.

In her sophomore year, the 19-year-old Sharon resident is an important part of the Orange's women's team where she is an outside hitter.

"It took me a while, right to the last hour," said MacTavish, a Huron Heights Secondary School graduate, who, ultimately, chose Syracuse over the University of Albany two years ago for its reputation in education and for the higher profile volleyball program. "I knew I had a chance to play, so that helped."

Not every Canadian heading south is as fortunate as MacTavish, a regular as an outside hitter in the Orange lineup from the start.

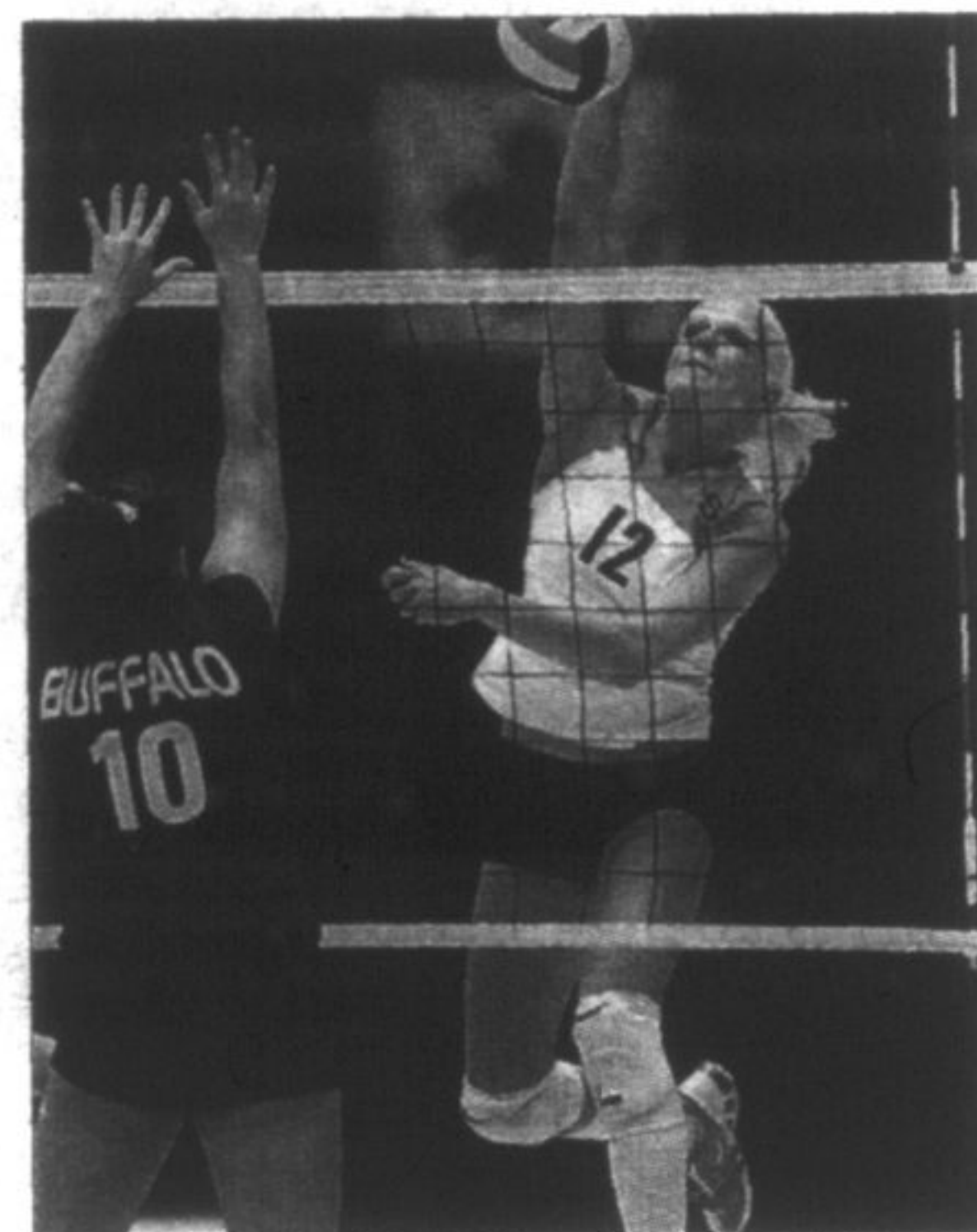
Even after missing 13 pre-season games due to a shoulder injury, she still saw court time immediately.

While MacTavish lingered over some Canadian schools, including the University of British Columbia, she settled on the American experience and finished as one of the statistical leaders on the team in her sophomore season.

"A large part of it was the atmosphere," said the five-foot, 10-inch MacTavish, who has aspirations to play at the 2012 Olympics in beach volleyball. "They take their sports seriously, and, obviously, there was the scholarship aspect to consider."

A biology major, she said three-a-day workouts in the pre-season were the norm, leaving little opportunity for life outside volleyball. Once the school year starts, daily workouts on top of classes and travel to and from games leaves little idle time.

"You have to put your priorities in order," she said. "You become friends with your teammates and the people in your classes. You get used to it but if that's what you want to do, it's fun. Personally, I don't know what I'd do



Kacie MacTavish is a sophomore at Syracuse University.

with those extra four hours a day."

It is the intensity of play that struck MacTavish right from the opening serve of her career. It drives the calibre of play to the next level, she noted, as teams fight for every victory.

"People are having their schooling paid for and don't want to give that up. Records count for everything."

If she had any misgivings before making her decision, they are gone.

"Not one," said MacTavish who didn't really get serious about chasing a scholarship until late in Grade 11. "I looked around for awhile. I really wanted to go to Albany but I decided Syracuse is what I should do."

MacTavish spent time researching her options, including roster checks to evaluate where she would fit in with the SU squad. She asked questions of athletes and coaches during her official visits to gather the necessary information.

"You have to find out who the competition is and your chances of playing," she said. "Obviously, you're trying to start over someone else."

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