

'His performance in the game speaks volumes': A profile of Alex Jurak, the top outside hitter on the Mohawk College men's volleyball team

By **Stephanie Ribson** February 26, 2024
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Alex Jurak jumps up to return serve during the Mountaineers game against the Niagara College Knights on Jan. 31, 2024.

During his 45-minute drive from Saint Catharines to Hamilton, Alex Jurak, the top outside hitter on the Mohawk Mountaineers men's volleyball team, listens to metal and rock music to help pass the time and occasionally traffic on his way to class. The mechanical engineering student balances his busy class, practice, and game schedules by prioritizing routine and organization.

According to Jurak, he's learned how to maintain his schedule without needing outside assistance or reminders using Google Calendar.

"There's another good rule that I've learned to follow, I can't remember where I heard it," Jurak said. "But it was, 'If something takes you five minutes or less, you do it now.'"

Jurak is dedicated off and on the court. He has been awarded Mohawk Mountaineer Athlete of the Week twice this season.

Jurak says his favorite moment from last season was at a home game on Super Saturday

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against the visiting Redeemer Royals. It was the last game of the evening, and it had come down to the Royals leading 14-13.

"I was up on the front row blocking and we got the game point," Jurak said. "I didn't even process the fact that we won the game. I just thought that was a huge point."

Sitting continuously for class can impact athletes' bodies. Jurak explained how helpful the staff were when treating him for shin splints, an injury caused by repetitive stress on the shinbone and surrounding connective tissue.

"I'm thankful for the athletic therapists and trainers here," Jurak said. "They are the people you want to get you through the season."

Jurak said he grew up watching his Polish father and his love of all sports, including volleyball.

"And then in elementary school we had a Slovenian coach, which has an excellent national volleyball team," Jurak said. "We connected through both of us being European, and he taught me some of the foundational skills of the game."

Jurak continued developing his volleyball skills through elementary school and then advanced to playing on the varsity team in high school where he was named team captain three years in a row.

"I took pride in being a team leader," Jurak recalled. "At the same time, in grade 11 and 12, I joined a local program called Pac Man Plus, a renowned volleyball club in Ontario."

Jurak continued to learn the intricacies of volleyball at the club while developing his techniques, tactics, and communication skills. After graduating high school, he was undecided about enrolling in post-secondary school, so he took a gap year before choosing Mohawk College.

According to Bhanu Shree, a devoted Mountaineers fan, Jurak transforms into a different person on the court.

"Alex stands as a formidable team pillar, exuding strength and determination," Shree said. "Despite his reserved attitude when he's off the court, his performance in the game speaks volumes and leaves a lasting impression, which is truly impressive."



Jurak (17) huddles with team members to strategize during their game against the Knights.

Similarly to moving chess pieces around on a board, Jurak said players must be moved around on the court to fill gaps left by those no longer on the team.

"We're going through a challenging phase right now because two of our middles, who are key players on the team, have left," Jurak said. "So we have to wade through deep water to make it work for the rest of the season."

Regardless, Jurak said the team still stands a good chance of making it to the championship this year.

"I'm confident in the ability of the guys and our cohesion. And our peaks are good," Jurak said. "So I want to pursue that as much as possible and see where it goes."

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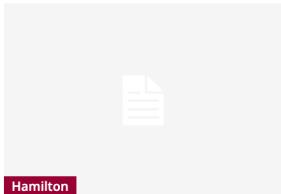
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