

Male Athlete of the Month

Shea Mandli

By Karina Schlect

Growing up in a family of athletes set senior basketball player Shea Mandli up for success in the sports world, but his hard work and dedication are what catapulted him up to the Division II level of college basketball. Following his older brother as a three-sport athlete in high school and finding encouragement from his parents who were both athletes, Mandli was a baseball pitcher, a football tight end, and a basketball post throughout his high school years. But the main push for him to continue basketball was what he received from colleges.

Mandli chose Concordia because of the location and smaller class sizes. He's close enough to home that he can go home for meals on occasion, and his family can come to all his home games. He likes the one-on-one time he can have with teachers instead of getting lost in the crowd of a bigger school. "A lot of teachers have helped me get job interviews," Mandli says, "The teachers in the marketing program are great."

As a marketing major looking to go into sales, he has enjoyed building the strong connection he has with his teachers, as well as with his friends and coaches – close relationships that Mandli believes he will have for a lifetime. "Concordia's just a great place. There's always someone to talk to, there's always something to do, there's all the events going on around here...definitely want to say thanks to Concordia for the opportunity that I've had."

As one of the four seniors on the team, Shea Mandli is one of the captains this season alongside Cole Olstad, who has been playing for five years now. "He's more the experienced guy who kind of shows

everyone the ropes and how we've done things traditionally," Mandli says, "For me, I think I'm more of the vocal leader...a little bit like the Energizer Bunny I guess, kind of bringing that energy to practice every day." He points out that they want to get better every practice, every day, and this is more of a struggle when the energy is low, so he takes on the responsibility of making sure guys are ready for practice and pumping the team up vocally.

Mandli says that the main goal for the team this season is to continue to be the top defensive team in the conference. "That's going to be our label as a team...our trademark." He explains that the Golden Bears want to be feared on the defensive end conference-wide, and thus ball screens and defending the post have been a main focus for the posts in their individual work. "All of us know how to score the ball, it's just been stopping the other post players and slowing up the guards on screens to enable our defense to give up less points."

At 6-feet 8-inches, Mandli is one of the tallest players on the court, which he started getting used to all the way back in seventh grade when he had a 9-inch growth spurt. He grew to his current height by his freshman year of high school. "I like that we're the anchor to the defense...the rim protectors," he says about the post position, "on offense I like that we do a lot of the dirty work...I like working hard, and to be able to be a great post player it's all effort – outworking the other guy." Because of this, Mandli learned early on that he wasn't going to get anywhere without hard work, and he has held onto that mantra in every area of his life.

Female Athlete of the Month

Kionda Nicks

By Tony Kohanek

December's Female Athlete of the Month is senior forward for the Concordia Women's basketball team, Kionda Nicks. Nicks started basketball at the age of seven following in the footsteps of her family, as she had two stepbrothers and one sister who all played basketball. At the age of 10, Nicks joined the Amateur Athletic Union's (AAU) basketball team and once in middle school she joined their school team.

Nicks attended high school at Highland Park in St Paul. There, she continued to do AAU basketball until the age of 17 while also playing for her high school's team. She averaged 11 points, 7 rebounds, 2 steals, 2.5 blocks, and 2.3 assist per game. In the fall of 2011 she signed her national letter of intent. She was also an All-Conference performer and All-State honorable mention. During high school, Nicks also did track and field. She was a thrower, doing both shot put and discus.

After high school, Nicks decided on Concordia University because of many different factors. Small class sizes, small campus, the location, and the coaching staff here at CU. In her first year playing basketball for Concordia, Nicks played all 30 games and was a starter in 27 of those games. She led the team with 53 blocks and was tied for third in rebounding with 4.9 per game. She had a career-high 13 points on Jan 4, with seven rebounds against Wayne State and almost had a double-double with 12 points and nine rebounds against Minnesota Crookston on February 27.

In Nicks' sophomore and junior seasons, she was voted to the NSIC All-Defensive Team. In her sophomore season, she appeared in

all 37 games and started in 32 of them. In Nicks' sophomore year she set a single-season school record for blocks with 104 and surpassed the career record at Concordia. She had double digit scoring in five games, and had two double-doubles. In one of her double-doubles, on Valentines Day, she set a new career record for herself with 14 points and she also had 11 rebounds. Her other double-double came earlier in the season on January 17 against Wayne State with 10 points and 10 rebounds.

In her junior season, she started 19 games and played in 29 of them. Upped her career high to 17 points on Nov. 23 at Northern Michigan. She scored in double figures three times and had four or more rebounds in 20 games and had two or more assists in 19 of the final 23 games. On January 2, against University of Minnesota Duluth, she had 11 points, four rebounds, four blocks, three steals and two assists. On January 9th she had six points, 6 rebounds and 6 blocks against Augustana.

According to Nicks, aside from statistics her first year she was very nervous being on the basketball team. Since that year, she has become more aggressive and has worked on her leadership skills. She also has come out of her shell; she was pretty shy when she first arrived. Her favorite memory is when the team made it to the Elite Eight in 2014. Nicks wants all of the fans to come out, and support Concordia women's basketball in their 2015-16 season.