Fraternal Forechecking

The brothers Biega planned it this way: all three are skating for the Crimson.

Sibbling rivalry can inspire, but sibling unanimity has some impressive virtues, too. Consider the brothers Biega—Alex ’10, Michael ’11, and Danny ’13—of Harvard’s ice hockey team. All hail from Montreal, Canada, and have been playing sports together most of their lives: ice hockey, soccer, and rowing, for example, at Salisbury School, a small, all-male private school in Connecticut with some formidable athletic teams. The Biega triumvirate all played on New England championship hockey teams there—Michael’s goal off a rebound from Alex’s shot won the school’s first title—with Alex and Danny chosen as captains and Alex and Michael successively honored as Salisbury’s athlete of the year. All three hope to play professionally in the National Hockey League (NHL). Yet the brethren aren’t clones: Alex and Danny are defensemen, and Michael’s a forward.

Danny’s new to Cambridge, but his older sibs have done damage on the intercollegiate ice for years now. Alex, this year’s Harvard captain, was named Harvard’s most valuable player last year, when he made the New England All-Star Team and the all-Ivy first team. With four goals and 16 assists, his 20 points were second on the squad, no mean feat for a defenseman. “With my stature,” he explains, laughing—at five feet 11 and 195 pounds, Alex is small for a defender—“you have to be an offense-minded defenseman.” He is the first defenseman in more than 20 years to lead Harvard in assists. (Three years ago, the Buffalo Sabres of the NHL drafted him in the fifth round; he’ll join that organization.)

Danny’s a forward, but his older brother’s given him a lot of advice about the life of a professional athlete. “You have to learn how to manage your time, recover, eat right,” Alex explains. “You won’t have nearly as much time to read during your career. You might be able to read because that’s what you love, or may need, to do. But you won’t have the time to think harder. But the goal of coursework is not to teach students how to do work solely in a classroom; it should teach students how to learn independently of structured programming, and to realize that simply following the rules and earning accolades does not constitute learning at all. A great-books education in particular—and a liberal-arts education in general—should teach students how to use their time, liberty, and independence creatively and intelligently. (Isn’t that what ‘liberal arts’ originally meant?) It should emphasize that reading in class is only training for the reading done outside class; it should show how to begin to develop and progress along a personal reading list in a mature and meaningful way. It should teach students to value a January off infinitely more than a January in a program, to see free time not as enforced boredom but irreplaceable opportunity.

To be fair, I can understand how students, especially in the sciences, would love, or may need, to be able to use Harvard’s research resources for a month. The general point remains the same, though, and a great-books program in particular should give its students only one reason why they’d want to come back to Harvard in January: to use the library.

The initial planning for “J-Term”—with talk of instituting month-long elective classes or study trips abroad—is gone for now. Perhaps, when the College is feeling a bit more secure financially, it will resurrect those plans. Personally, though, I like to think that Harvard students by then will have become so used to spending January on their own terms that no one will want to come back. January will become the time when one can finally tackle Hard Times or Das Kapital, and the clearest sign that a Harvard education is working will be an empty, snowy Yard.

Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow

Spencer Lenfield ’12 expects to spend his January finishing War and Peace.

John Harvard’s Journal

Ries and continents—those are what students take in place of a more clearly delineated course of study.

If we have such courses, though, what is ultimately missing? I brought this up with two friends who’d taken a popular freshman seminar in Hellenic literature, “Foundation Texts of the West,” last year. They both told me, “It helps to have a professor say, ‘Look, we don’t have time to read the entire Western canon, so I’m going to choose these salient examples, and we’ll learn these.’” I agree—mostly. It is important to have a good professor who can help lead you through key works, using them to teach you how to think and read more deeply.

But it is equally important to keep those “salient examples” in perspective. Outside the debate over what should be taught, the goal of a great-books program should be to urge students to keep reading beyond the program, and to teach them how to do so. It should acknowledge its own incompleteness, urging students to take it as merely introductory, rather than as some comprehensive experience. “Great Books,” suggesting a monolithic but coherent undertaking, is an unfortunate name; perhaps a better title would be “Some Great Books.” And the goal of a Some Great Books curriculum should be, metaphorically if not literally, to teach students what to do with their January off.

Classes are marvelous things; professors are terrific people; classmates always manage to make one think harder. But the goal of coursework is not to teach students how to learn solely in a classroom, any more than it is to teach them how to think solely in a classroom. A good class teaches students how to learn independently of “structured programming,” and to realize that simply following the rules and earning accolades does not constitute learning at all. A great-books education in particular—and a liberal-arts education in general—should teach students how to use their time, liberty, and independence creatively and intelligently. (Isn’t that what “liberal arts” originally meant?) It should emphasize that reading in class is only training for the reading done outside class; it should show how to begin to develop and progress along a personal reading list in a mature and meaningful way. It should teach students to value a January off infinitely more than a January in a program, to see free time not as enforced boredom but irreplaceable opportunity.

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ference (ECAC) with 19.2 percent effectiveness, scoring 24 times in 125 chances.

The Biegas have nurtured their skills since the two eldest were seven and six years of age and their mother jolted them from their video games by announcing that she had signed them up for hockey lessons. They’d play all day long on the lake behind their house: the classic two-on-two game would pit the two middle sibs against the oldest and youngest: Michael and Danny against Alex and their fourth brother, Marc, a forward, now 15. “That’s how we fell in love with it,” says Michael. “Our friends would stop by to play.” “It got pretty competitive, too,” adds Danny. “The only reason the games would end was because there was a fight. It wasn’t because we were tired or didn’t want to play any more. Our parents would yell at us and break us apart—that’s what ended the game.”

Only one other trio of brothers has skated for Harvard: the Moores of Toronto—Mark ’00, Steve ’01, and Dominic ’03 in 1999-2000 (see “Gimme Some Moore,” March-April 2000, page 88). Like the Moores, fraternal bonds pay dividends for the Biegas. “We’re all kind of like best friends,” says Michael. “So if we’re having a rough practice, or something’s wrong, you can easily talk to them.” When playing defense in practices, “If I have a one-on-one with Mike, I think I have the advantage because I know exactly what he’s going to do,” says Danny. Michael agrees: “Whenever we drill one-on-ones, I hate when I go against them—they love to stop me.”

This year, the Biegas will apply their skills amid some fine company. The Crimson’s top seven scorers have returned, along with Kyle Richter, who led all ECAC goaltenders in 2007-2008 with a 1.82 goals-against average and .935 save percentage. Eight freshmen have arrived whom Alex calls “immediate impact players.” He adds that the “team chemistry is great. In my four years here, I’ve never seen the team this tight before.” This year’s revised academic calendar, which places exam period before the Christmas break, should also help Harvard with its January and February hockey schedule—including the annual Beanpot tournament, which tough competition and January exams have made into an elusive prize.

Last year’s Beanpot had a Biega Moment when Harvard trailed Boston University, 4-3, with only seconds left in the first game. Danny was watching on TV at Salisbury. “Harvard called a time-out,” he recalls, “and I see Alex and Mike. All I can see on the camera is M. BIEGA and A. BIEGA—they’re talking to each other. You could tell they were working up some kind of plan, some kind of play. The puck dropped, Alex passed to Mike, Mike passed back to Alex—and he scored! I was in my dorm room with 15 or 16 other kids, who all know Alex and Mike, and the room just erupted.” As it turned out, the game clock had ticked down to .000 just before the goal, so it did not count and BU went on to win the Beanpot (and, later, the national championship). But the moment was electric.

The Biegas planned it this way: this year, for the first time, all three have a chance to play for the same squad. Danny Biega accelerated his graduation from Salisbury (where Dan Donato, brother of Harvard coach Ted Donato ’91, coached the two elder Biegas) with summer study and a six-course load so that he’d be able to join his brethren on the Harvard squad for one season: this one. As he says, “It’s just like we’re playing on that pond again.”

~CRAIG LAMBERT

Soccer Champs

The men’s soccer squad (14-4-1, 5-1-1 Ivy) ended their season as Ivy League champions, ranked tenth in the nation. They reached the third round of the NCAA tournament after a bye and a 3-0 win over Monmouth before falling, 2-0, to Maryland, the defending national champions. Andre Akpan ’10 was named Ivy League Player of the Year and is Harvard’s all-time leading scorer with 127 points (47 goals, 33 assists); those 47 goals tie him with Chris Ohiri ’64 for a Harvard record. Brian Rogers ’13 was Ivy Rookie of the Year.

The women booters (9-7-1, 6-1 Ivy) also captured an outright Ivy championship after sharing it in 2008. Boston College ousted Harvard, 1-0, in the first round of the NCAA tournament. Leading scorer (21 points) Katherine Sheeleigh ’11 was a First Team all-Ivy selection.