

SPORTS

THORNHILL

CHAT star credits dance for helping in basketball**Jack Borenstein**

SPORTS

Any time you score more points than minutes on the court, you're doing something special.

Tanenbaum CHAT (Kimel Centre) Cougars point guard Megan Brenkel's extraordinary 42 points in a 48-46 loss recently to St. Maximilian was the top-scoring effort by any GTA female basketball player this season. It was an extraordinary effort that aptly demonstrated to teammates, coaches and other players how strong her basketball court skills have developed during the past few years.

She gives some of the credit to dance.



Megan Brenkel credits dance with helping her body control in basketball.

"Participating in competitive dance enabled me to have good control of my body in tight game situations," she said. "It allowed me to use my dribbling skills

(like my crossover) to beat my defender and explode past them to finish the play."

The Thornhill born-and-raised resident said she and her family enjoy and appreciate all aspects of Judaism.

"The cultural and religious aspects of our South African family background fit in nicely at Chabad Lubavitch of Markham, where we attend Shabbat and Jewish holiday services and where I had my bat mitzvah. Attending CHAT Kimel and Chabad Lubavitch have helped me gain an appreciation of what a Jewish person should be."

Brenkel, 17, spent two years playing house league basketball with Markham Silver Knights then one season for IEM in Newmarket, both in the Ontario Basketball Association (OBA).

Brenkel has been part of the Cougars consecutive Weiner Memorial Basketball Tournament championships the past two years.

"My most memorable game was winning the tournament last

year. Playing against top-quality high schools, along with meeting many Jewish teens from all over, was a great experience. The Cougars are looking for a 'threepeat' at the Weiner Tournament this December."

Brenkel said that playing in the higher ranked Tier 1 in the York Region Athletic Association this season has been extremely difficult at times, but we keep on pushing and competing right to the end.

Ample proof of this attitude occurred in the St. Maximilian game as the Cougars trailed by 14 at half-time.

"Nobody thought there was a chance to come back," said Brenkel. "We needed a spark and I told my teammates to come out running hard right from the start of the second half to put pressure on our opponent. I took open shots at every opportunity that dropped in the basket and we took the lead. Though we lost right at the end I was very proud of our effort and feel that will help our team's motivation

going forward knowing we can compete against anyone. The mental part of the game is important in terms of determining on-court success."

Brenkel's current Cougars season highlights also include scoring 23 points against Bill Crothers and 21 points versus Aurora, preceded by her participation in the annual Nike National Invitational Challenge last summer in Chicago with Toronto U17 Junior Rams.

Brenkel considers herself a team leader in terms of "running the offence and communicating with teammates on defence. Every coach has told me I have great on-court vision and have been creative to get the ball to my teammates."

Her coaches have high praise for Brenkel's current and potential basketball development.

Krupski said that Brenkel has worked incredibly hard "and is always trying to improve. Megan is one of those rare athletes that understood that if she put in the work, the results would follow

and they have. She would find an area of her game that may have been considered a weakness [and] work on it endlessly until she turned it into one of her strengths."

Krupski added that her leadership skills "make those playing around her stronger and better... She provides positive feedback to her teammate and instills her basketball knowledge to her teammates in a caring manner."

She wants to play basketball in Canada or the US next year "and am looking forward to playing at the next level. All my preparations are to get stronger and be more aggressive on defensive coverage."

Brenkel has been looking for a balance between academics (she's going into health/biomedical sciences) and basketball.

"It is very important to me to receive a good education while playing the sport I love."

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Jewish baseball players take part in unique artwork project**Mike Cohen**

QUEBEC BUREAU CHIEF

As baseball fever hits a fever pitch with the World Series, the owner of an American product that combines the great old game and Judaism while raising significant dollars for charity would like to do some business in Canada. Jewishbaseballplayer.com offers a new lithograph painting that depicts 27 Jewish baseball players and contains the signatures of 26 of them, except the late Hall of Famer Hank Greenberg.

Greg Harris, a Jewish lawyer from Buffalo Grove, Ill., is the man behind the project. The group ranges from 89-year-old 1953 MVP Al Rosen and Sandy Koufax, the most dominant pitcher of the 1960s. There are also 1970s and 1980s superstars such as Cy Young winner Steve Stone and World Series MVP Steve Yeager; 1990s 30-30 club and 49 home run hitter, Shawn Green, who toiled for the Toronto Blue Jays; to the active superstars of today in Ryan Braun, Kevin Youkilis and Ian Kinsler. Harris believes the project

will also educate people, especially the Jewish population, as to the role of the Jewish athlete in major league baseball.

"As a young Jewish boy, I grew up loving baseball and helping my dad with his charity golf outings every year," said Harris. "For the past six years, in my spare time, I have run a foundation for a major league baseball pitcher, which helped build a \$1.8 million stadium for kids with special needs. In 2008, on a trip to the Baseball Hall of Fame with my son, we saw a painting of the Negro League stars and absolutely loved it. That's when it hit me that I had to create one celebrating our Jewish heritage. Now, after five years in the making, my family and I fulfilled our dream by combining our Jewish heritage, passion for baseball and lessons of giving to complete this labour of love."

The 24-by-36-inch painting is being sold in five editions. So far more than \$80,000 has been given to different charities and Harris anticipates hitting the \$500,000 plateau by the time the project runs its



Former Toronto Blue Jay Shawn Green signs the lithograph that depicts 27 Jewish baseball players.

course. One donation, for instance, benefitted Team Israel's quest to gain entry into the World Baseball Classic. The work of art was auctioned off, earning thousands of dollars for the cause.

More than four dozen charities have climbed on board thus far, including a number of Jewish organizations. All qualifying charities can earn \$500 for each and every work of art purchased through their ef-

forts. Their efforts can be substantial or as minimal as sending an email blast to their mailing list.

Harris is very anxious to get the word out to charities in Canada. He can be reached at

JewishBaseball18@aol.com.

"This has been a golden age for Jewish baseball players," noted Harris. "Where once they seldom appeared on the scene, there are now typically 12 to 15 in each season. Jews have always loved baseball – the games, the players, the trivia, the stats, the literature, the collectibles and now they can add art to the list, which can be enjoyed every day hanging on their wall.

"The logistics of putting this project together was daunting. Dealing with all 36 people's schedules and travelling the country with the 500 lithos to have each individually signed every piece was a true team effort. Of course, having seldom-seen Sandy Koufax agree to participate and enthusiastically get behind the litho was the icing on the cake. This was well worth the undertaking as it is a historic litho that will stand the test of time."

For more information: www.jewishbaseballplayer.com, jewishbaseball18@aol.com and see this video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnBFmjuBXu0>.