



ONTARIO HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CAMBRIDGE, Ont. – The Ontario Hockey Association (OHA) is pleased to announce that Darren Smale (St. Marys, Ont.) has been named the recipient of the 2019-20 OHA Trainer of the Year award.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR – Darren Smale, St. Marys Lincolns

Smale first worked for the Lincolns when he was in high school, and after a few stops, he rejoined the club and his brother, Greg Smale (General Manager) in the 2018-19 season as the team's trainer and equipment manager. He has also been involved with St. Marys minor hockey for 15 years.

As trainer and equipment manager, Smale's responsibility is to oversee player safety and any and all equipment needs.

Smale is a Level 1 Trainer with a plethora of experience in the sports world. Born and raised in St. Marys, Smale's journey to become a Trainer began in High School when he joined the St. Marys Lincolns equipment staff. When Smale moved away to attend college, he sought out a way to stay involved with hockey, and was hired by the Ontario Hockey League's (OHL) Sudbury Wolves where he worked as the team's trainer for the duration of his studies. Since then he has also worked with the London Majors (Intercounty Baseball League), the Toronto Argonauts (Canadian Football League) and was recently hired as head clubhouse manager for the Rocket City Trash Pandas who are the AA affiliate of the Major League Baseball's Anaheim Angels.

In 2019-20, Smale was a part of the hockey staff that helped lead the Lincolns to a third place regular season finish in the Greater Ontario Junior Hockey League's (GOJHL) Western Conference. He also spent time with the Argonauts staff, and was recruited to join the Trash Pandas, who are located in Madison, Alabama. The newly named Trash Pandas are expected to compete in 2020.

In his time with St. Marys, Smale has become one of the GOJHL's most respected trainers. Team President Brandon Boyd had this to say of his trainer. "In a small market like St. Marys, it is difficult to find somebody with the proper qualifications, let alone willing to put in the gruelling hours that can be asked of trainers and equipment staff. Not only does Darren (Smale) excel at this, but he takes pride in doing it to the very best of his ability. It motivates his staff, and in turn the players to also give everything they have to achieve their goals. As a development league, it is the exact mentality we wish to preach to the young men coming through our program. Darren (Smale) accomplishes this while keeping the players safe, making them feel valued, and ensures everyone has fun while doing so."

Away from the rink, football field and baseball diamond, Smale previously earned a degree in American Sign Language and has worked as a teacher for the deaf and as sign language interpreter for several

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years before leaving to pursue a passion to start his own farm in 2013. He is currently employed by a local school board as an education assistant.

The Lincolns describe Smale as an outgoing, hard-working perfectionist who is extremely committed to his craft. The team says he creates an environment where the players can feel safe and valued and his hard work has not gone unnoticed as he's made the leap from Junior B hockey to the CFL to professional baseball.

Smale is considered an integral part of the Lincolns as the rapport between players and trainers is one of the most important relationships within any sports club. "Darren (Smale) puts more hours per week in than possibly anyone, and it is clear that he is valued by players, staff and the board," described the Lincolns. Smale also joins the team for all post-game/post-practice activities such as team meals, fundraisers and social events.

Congratulations to Darren Smale on being named the 2019-20 OHA Trainer of the Year.

The OHA would also like to recognize the following Trainer of the Year candidates, who were nominated during the selection process: Brittany Boot (Georgetown Raiders, OJHL) and Dr. Nicholas Anthony (Whitby Dunlops, ACH). Each of the mentioned trainers were an integral part of their respective club's success in 2019-20.

Recent Winners - OHA Trainer of the Year

- 2008-09 Sarah Norris, Orillia Tundras (MLH)
- 2009-10 Mike Grupstra, Brantford Golden Eagles (GOJHL)
- 2010-11 Bob Bressette, Alvinston Flyers (Great Lakes Jr. C)
- 2011-12 Amanda Gilroy, Pickering Panthers (OJHL)
- 2012-13 Adam Ripley, Essex 73's (Great Lakes Jr. C)
- 2013-14 Gary Schaefer, Elmira Sugar Kings (GOJHL)
- 2014-15 Drew Laskoski, Newmarket Hurricanes (OJHL)
- 2015-16 Michel Dompierre, Niagara Falls Canucks (GOJHL)
- 2016-17 Sarah Ditmars, Trenton Golden Hawks (OJHL)
- 2017-18 Cory Birk, Listowel Cyclones (GOJHL)
- 2018-19 Kirk Gibbons, Kincardine Bulldogs (PJHL)

Photo credit: *St. Marys Lincolns*

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