

THE MONADNOCK LEDGER-TRANSCRIPT 2019

★ MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR ★ MANNY BOWMAN, CONVAL

Selfless three-sport senior captain led ConVal to best sports year in decades



STAFF PHOTOS BY BEN CONANT
Manny Bowman of ConVal is the 2019 Monadnock Ledger-Transcript Male Athlete of the Year. Top left: Bowman and the boys' basketball team went 19-2 and made it to the Final Four. Top right: Bowman made First Team All-State as the Cougars went 18-1 and won the school's first-ever soccer championship. Bottom right: Bowman played shortstop for ConVal as they went 14-6 and made it to the quarterfinal round in the playoffs. Bottom left: Bowman celebrates a youth baseball win circa 2012.

By BEN CONANT
Monadnock Ledger-Transcript

Three-sport senior captain Manny Bowman led ConVal to one of the most successful athletic campaigns in school history this year.

Bowman was a four-year varsity player in soccer, basketball and baseball, grinding year-round for the entirety of his ConVal career. But it wasn't until his senior year that the hard work was finally realized.

"It was three very special teams," Bowman said. "In each of those sports, it was the best chemistry we've ever had on any of those teams I've played on."

Aside from one 17-2 soccer season in 2016, Bowman's ConVal teams did more losing than winning - coming into his senior year, the teams he'd played on had gone a combined 66-91, well below .500. But this year, everything changed, and it started with Bowman.

"For the prior three years, he was sort of like everyone's younger brother," said ConVal boys' soccer coach Josh Smith.

"Having gone through that and experienced that, when he was a senior he had that weight lifted off his shoulders. I think that contributed to the success that he had on the field and the success we had as a team."

Bowman soaked it all in over his four years of varsity action, as captains with varying leadership styles came and went. When it came time for him to take the helm, he'd seen it all.

"There's no cookie-cutter mold for a captain," Bowman said. "Over the course of four years, I've seen so many great players, some great players who have bad mentalities, some worse players with good mentalities. With all the people I've played with, I was able to mold a good leader for myself."

The ConVal boys' soccer team lost just one game the entire season, going 18-1 and winning the first soccer state championship in school history, the trophy that had always eluded the Cougars despite their perennial high level of play. Bow-

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“He had a great relationship with everyone. Everyone had a lot of respect for him. I think they did because he was very honest and he led by example. No one in the gym was gonna work harder than him... He wasn't always the most skilled player on the court but he was always the hardest working, so I think when he spoke, the few times when he did speak when we had team meetings or we had things we needed to go over, nobody else was talking, everybody was listening.

LEO GERSHGORIN, CONVAL BOYS' BASKETBALL



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Monadnock Ledger-Transcript Male Athlete of the Year: Manny Bowman

BOWMAN FROM 11

man's growth as a leader and a player was a major factor.

"The first three years you look at him," Smith said, "he's got all the physical attributes, all the skill, but he hasn't put it together yet. This year he was tremendous."

Bowman was named a First Team All-State defender.

"What allowed him to make First Team All-State was the way that he plays," Smith said. "He's physical, he's fast, he's strong, he's fearless, he's a good one-on-one defender, he's a smart player."

Bowman would be the first to tell you he wasn't necessarily the best player on any of his teams, but his impact as a hard worker who did all the little things was undeniable, as the ConVal renaissance that started on the soccer pitch kept rolling through a stunningly successful basketball season and the first winning baseball season since 2015.

"I wasn't always the biggest or strongest, but hard work gets you a long way," Bowman said.

"Most importantly what he contributed was that guys had so much respect for him," said ConVal boys' basketball coach Leo Gershgorin said. "He had a great relationship with everyone. Everyone had a lot of respect for him. I think they did because he was very honest and he led by example. No one in the gym was gonna work harder than him... He wasn't always the most skilled player on the court but he was always the hardest working, so I think when he spoke, the few times when he did speak when we had team meetings or we had things we needed to go over, nobody else was talking, everybody was listening. He was a great leader. He used his own accountability to drive other people's accountability."

Bowman's never-quit attitude was infectious, as the Cougars' soccer, basketball and baseball teams racked up a stunning 51-9 record over the course of the year thanks to stellar clutch play late in games.

In baseball, it seemed like every other game was a walkoff or extra-innings win for ConVal; the hoops team played their share of overtime games and ended the regular season with a buzzerbeater win, and the soccer team made comeback after comeback and seemed to win every tight game.

"Our teams just wouldn't quit," Bowman said. "That's a sign of hard work, of being mentally strong."

Bowman's first varsity soccer goal didn't come until his senior year, but it was a big one, capping off a ConVal comeback against Hollis-Brookline that saw the Cougars go down 2-1 in the final minutes before tying it up and then winning on a backshot from the captain.

"He just stepped up in big moments like that," Smith said.

As a captain, Bowman was never too hard on his team – including himself, which was another area of growth in his senior year. He recalled his youth baseball days, hitting balls for hours after coming home from games where he didn't feel like he'd performed well, snapping a



STAFF PHOTOS BY BEN CONANT
Manny Bowman, the 2019 Monadnock Ledger-Transcript Male Athlete of the Year, served as captain for the ConVal boys' soccer, boys' basketball and baseball teams during his senior season. Above: Bowman helped lead the ConVal boys' basketball team to its best season in years, as the Cougars went 19-2 and made it to the Final Four. Left: Bowman was a first-team all-state defender for the boys' soccer team that went 18-1 and won the first state championship in school history. Far left: Bowman played shortstop for a ConVal baseball team that finished 14-6 overall and advanced to the quarterfinals.

wooden bat on a particularly frustrating day.

"I've learned over my four years, and especially the last two, to tone it down a bit, not to be so hard on myself, because it can hurt your game," Bowman said. "All year long I tried to be upbeat and fun, because I've been on plenty of teams where kids yell at each other, and it's just never beneficial. So I tried to keep it upbeat, keep kids happy and keep my-

self happy. That's something that leads to a lot of success. I give a lot of credit to my coaches because they trusted me to do so. They gave us a lot of freedom to express ourselves and allow us to be ourselves and play well."

Bowman's varsity sports career is behind him now; he'll attend Clark University in the fall, undeclared, and likely play some intramurals, but the three-season varsity grind

plus offseason training is over. For a kid who managed to do all that for four years, plus participate in student council, the Student Athletic Leadership Team and a slew of other activities, the sky's the limit now that he might actually have some time on his hands.

"He's going to do amazing things, there's no doubt about it," Gershgorin said.

Whatever he does, he'll be working hard at it.

"He's physical, he's fast, he's strong, he's fearless, he's a good one-on-one defender, he's a smart player."

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