

## **Curtis School Alumni Profile: James McNamara**

(for inclusion in Curtis' 2011 Annual Report)

By Vanessa Ziff Lasdon

Champion water polo athlete James McNamara is a big fish in a big-time pond, now attending freshman year at Brown University, and fulfilling a dream held since his elementary days at Curtis School.

James dove in deep with the Los Angeles Water Polo Club back in fifth grade, after watching his cousins play for Harvard-Westlake. Traditional sports have always played a big role in the McNamara household, but there's definitely something special in the water for this family when it comes to aquatic sports. Each of the boys, including Henry (16) and Patrick (12), are involved in competitive water polo and swim programs. Outside of water polo, all three McNamara boys are avid skiers and surfers.

James holds a list of accolades that would humble any athlete. As a junior at Harvard-Westlake, he set three swim records, breaking a long-standing best since 1967 in the 100 Butterfly. After four years captaining the varsity swim and water polo teams, James earned the Daily News Water Polo Player of the Year award, was named MVP of both varsity teams, and was awarded the Division One, First Team All CIF trophy. James also swept four years of Mission League awards for high school water polo, as well as four All-American top honors in swimming: two for 100 Butterfly and two on winning relay teams. James points to the pinnacle of his water polo career as being selected out of high school to play for the US Junior National Team, and bringing home a silver medal last August at the UANA International Championships.

Riding high on a wave of success in both water polo and academics, James was recruited by schools like UCLA and Cal Berkeley, but ultimately chose to play for the prestigious Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, where he's already made a huge splash. As a freshman at Brown this past fall, James, a 6-foot-3, right-handed attacker, was named Northern Division Rookie of the Week four times in one season, and was one of only twelve students from the east coast invited onto the All Eastern Conference Team. Not surprisingly, James went on to clinch the 2010 CWPA Eastern Championship Rookie of the Tournament award this past November. During his first season with the Bears, James was a decisive player in helping his team secure fifth place overall in the Division III Eastern Championships.

Behind the acrobatic movements of a water polo match is a relentless competition of endurance, strength, agility, sport IQ, and self-discipline -- all attributes essential to James as an elite competitor. Water polo players swim an average of 1.5 miles per game as they quick-switch between offense and defense, egg-beating their legs for thirty-two live minutes in whirling deep water, arms overhead, rebounding off pure energy to shoot, block, spin, sprint, and back cut. Wrap swimming, soccer, basketball and wrestling into one sport and the results come close to water polo. Yet, for all his innate drive and talent, James' success would not have been possible without an outstanding lineup of coaches, his first being Rio Saken, and the extraordinary dedication of his parents, Teresa and Michael McNamara, not the least of which means driving cross-country and keeping the house stocked for three active boys and their perpetually hungry teammates.

In a sport where every move must be earned, James holds the highest appreciation of all for his teammates and for the camaraderie it takes to win. "There's nothing more valuable than being part of a team," James states, "where everyone holds each other accountable. These guys are my best friends."

Despite the recent string of winter storms, James loves the diverse college life in Providence. Excited about his lineup of classes and professors at Brown, he's currently leaning toward a degree in history. Meanwhile, the future is looking bright for James, who hopes to be selected again this year for the Junior National Team and travel with his family to Greece to play in the Junior World Championships. It's hard to imagine James McNamara, Curtis School's own rising water polo star, letting anyone down.