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[Malaney captains the Vikings ship](#)

By Ryan Nagelhout [Niagara Gazette](#)

Every team needs a leader. For Grand Island captain Mike Malaney, leadership came easy.

The Vikings senior has helped keep a young federation hockey team competitive with his drive and determination this season, impressing his coach along the way.

“Mike was one of our go-to guys last year but he’s really been the go-to guy this year,” Grand Island coach Don Pray said. “He was an assistant captain on our team last year and this year he was the clear-cut choice and was picked unanimously. He exhibits the great qualities of a leader, on and off the ice.”

Grand Island saw a number of players leave for club teams over the last few years, but Malaney has stuck with the Vikings in their second year playing Federation hockey.

“I just use Mike everywhere,” Pray said. “Penalty kills, the power play. He’s got very good hands and a very strong shot.”

Malaney leads the Vikings with seven goals and 12 points heading into Monday’s game against West Seneca West. Ask him about his numbers, though, and he’s quick to dismiss their importance.

“Goals and assists don’t really matter too much in the big games,” Malaney said. “It just matters if we win or lose.”

Last Thursday the Vikings came up just short in one of those “big games.” Facing Kenmore East, the No. 2 ranked small school in the state according to the New York State Sportswriters Association poll, the Vikings lost 3-2.

Playing well in big games is nice, but Malaney said his team has made a habit of playing tough against big opponents.

“The past two years I’ve been trying to have good games against good teams,” he said. “Against really good teams we definitely play up to their level, that’s why we have so many close games.”

Pray said his captain always plays well against the best competition.

“We were up north in the early part of the year, in Lake Placid,” Pray said. “We played

some of the better teams from upstate and Mike still stood out on the ice. He's that good a player."

Malaney led a comeback effort against North Tonawanda earlier this season. Trailing 2-1 in the third, the Vikings tied the game on the power play and Malaney set up the game-winner minutes later. He later picked a Lumberjack's pocket in the neutral zone and added the insurance goal that helped Grand Island pull away for the win.

"I guess it just comes naturally," Malaney said. "I'm trying to lead a team of some younger guys."

Pray said his captain fits the bill through and through.

"He's a role model, a leader in the locker room," Pray said. "What's nice about Mike is that he's a model student-athlete, too."

Pray would know. He taught Malaney in AP U.S. History and has him this year in AP Psychology.

Malaney hopes to attend Penn State in the fall and try out for the club team. The Big 10 school doesn't have a Division I team yet, but he's eager for the chance to make the Nittany Lions club squad.

That is, of course, after testing himself against some of the area's best players.

"I'll be at the tryouts," Malaney said. "But there's a lot more competitive hockey in Western New York left."