

# THE DALHOUSIE GAZETTE

NORTH AMERICA'S OLDEST CAMPUS NEWSPAPER, EST. 1868



INTEREST IN CHESS HAS SKYROCKETED SINCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE RELEASE OF THE HIT NETFLIX SHOW *THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT*. LOCAL CHESS PLAYERS ARE ENJOYING THE WORLD'S RENEWED ENTHUSIASM FOR THE GAME. (PHOTO BY GEOFFREY HOWARD)

## Checkmate on COVID-19

*The Queen's Gambit* and the pandemic drive Haligonians to the chessboard

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

## Optimism is the way forward

Dear reader,

Recently I skimmed through my editorials from last year and found many were quite depressing. I don't regret their underlying sentiments; they reflected the issues of the day – 2020 was a dark time. While I don't think the new year will lead to any quick solutions of the world's dilemmas, I do believe 2021 deserves our optimism.

In the United States there's finally a rational president in the White House again, and we hope he will wield his power to change the world for the better. President Joe Biden's plan to cancel the Keystone XL pipeline is one of those steps toward a better future. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau may not be happy about it, but I am. So are the thousands of climate and Indigenous rights activists who have long been arguing against the pipeline, which would have caused great environmental damage and harm to Indigenous communities.

Another piece of positive news to celebrate: In case you forgot, 2020 was the year we developed a vaccine in the quickest time ever (like, ever in the history of the world). Can we take a second to marvel at the miraculous work scientists have done to combat COVID-19? And yes, our provincial governments here in Canada have been inefficient in their delivery of COVID-19 vaccines, but at least we know they're on their way.

What I'm trying to say is this: There is much to be hopeful about in 2021. All Dalhousie University students, faculty and staff should be incredibly proud we completed an entire term online. To survive a second one, I plan to focus on the positive. Perhaps you should too.



-Tarini Fernando, Editor-in-chief

### Correction

In issue 153-8, an opinions article titled "The dangers of digital dragnets" stated the Be On The Lookout (BOLO) program shared digital geoinformation to help police find missing criminals. This is not true. The BOLO program uses targeted advertising campaigns to help generate awareness about and find missing criminals. The *Dalhousie Gazette* has updated the article online and apologizes for this error.

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EST. 1868

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## THE FINE PRINT

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# DSU and Dal fight food insecurity

## Community rallies to support DSU Food Bank and other student-led initiatives

BY ANASTASIA PAPADOPOULOS

Dalhousie University and the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) have joined forces to help students struggling to keep food on the table amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

In December 2020, Dal and the DSU collaborated to raise funds for the DSU's five student-led food security initiatives: the Loaded Ladle, the DSU Farmer's Market, the DSU Food Bank, the DSU Sustainability Office and the Food Pantry on the Agricultural campus in Truro, N.S. Together, they raised more than \$70,000.

Led by Dalhousie, the money was raised through a province-wide fundraising drive called the Food Security Project. The fundraiser was initiated after Giving Tuesday, a global day for donating and volunteering on Dec. 1, 2020, which was started by a group of Canadian organizations.

A large portion of the funds the DSU and Dal raised will go toward supporting the DSU Food Bank.

### The pandemic's effect on the food bank

COVID-19 has increased food insecurity issues across the country. A recent survey conducted by Statistics Canada exploring the impacts of COVID-19 on food insecurity and mental health revealed about one in seven Canadians were in a food-insecure household in the month of May 2020.

This issue of food insecurity has been reflected in the Dal community, according to Isa Wright, the DSU's vice-president (finance and operations). Currently, the DSU Food Bank is the most in-demand DSU student service, Wright said. The food bank provides an essential service to students who may suffer from food insecurity issues for various reasons such as unexpected reduction of income, student loan delays or unanticipated living expenses.

The demand for food support this academic year has increased among international students, according to Wright.

"A lot of international students were stuck here without really any support, especially if their families were locked down elsewhere," Wright said. "They got very little support from the government and so a lot of them ended up using the food bank."

The DSU Food Bank is largely supported



THE DSU FOOD BANK PROVIDES FREE FOOD TO DALHOUSIE STUDENTS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY. CURRENTLY, THE FOOD BANK IS OPERATING BY APPOINTMENT ONLY. (PHOTO BY LIBERTYEAGLE)

through Feed Nova Scotia, a subsidiary of Food Banks Canada, and via donations made by Dalhousie faculty and staff. The DSU Food Bank is non-levied, which means Dal students do not pay for the service through their student fees. Therefore, the food bank's access to funds is low and those engaged with the initiative are primarily volunteers.

### How the funds will help

Micha Davies-Cole, the manager of the DSU Food Bank, said the recent fundraiser has given the food bank "more stability."

"It gave us the ability to try reaching more people with food than we could before," said Davies-Cole.

Prior to 2021, the DSU Food Bank primarily relied on volunteer staffing, with Davies-Cole as the one paid part-time manager. Due to the increased use of the food bank during the pandemic, the DSU found it needed more support. As a result, part of the new funds will be used to create two new part-time staff positions and to increase Davies-Cole's hours.

"I was working well over 40 hours per week. It turned into meetings and discussions. . . a lot of phone calls, a lot of trying to balance finding bodies to help when everybody was in isolation," Davies-Cole said. "I went from needing one to two people in for a couple of hours per shift to having a workforce of about eight to 10 for those same hours per shift."

The DSU hopes the creation of new part-time positions will help alleviate some of the pressure on volunteer staff.

According to Wright, more funding raised through the Food Security Project will become available to the food bank soon to ensure it can continue operations effectively.

### How the money was raised

In response to the magnitude of students needing support on food security issues, the DSU's executive team decided to explore a partnership with Dalhousie to raise funds on Giving Tuesday.

According to Wright, the executive took insights from discussions with Davies-Cole and used them to provide context to Dalhousie, illustrating the severity of food insecurity issues facing students.

Wright said Dalhousie did a lot of legwork for getting the word out about the need for funds. Notably, Dal helped to secure the support of the J and W Murphy Foundation, a private Halifax-based charitable organization supporting the Halifax community. The foundation agreed to match donations up to \$20,000 in support of DSU's food security initiatives, according to a Dal press release. Overall, the foundation supported nine Nova Scotian universities on Giving Tuesday to raise funds for food insecurity.

Dal also kicked off the fundraising by providing a \$1,000 opening gift. The remainder of the funds were raised through a projectDAL crowdfunding campaign.

### The food bank continues to adapt

This winter, COVID-19 continues to pose

obstacles for the DSU Food Bank.

"The irony with COVID is that because everything is so fluid, you kind of have to come up with a new way to game plan sometimes every day you're in there," said Davies-Cole.

One new protocol employed by the food bank is to have students register to pick up their food ahead of time. It's an effort to avoid long lineups, which make social distancing difficult. Students can register to pick up a box on the food bank's website: [www.dsu.ca/foodbank](http://www.dsu.ca/foodbank).

Davies-Cole said enhanced communication is essential and encourages those needing access to food bank services to reach out if they have questions.

The DSU executive team plans to continue to work closely with Davies-Cole to ensure the appropriate support is there for the DSU Food Bank.

Wright said building a collaborative relationship with the food bank and Davies-Cole has been helpful for developing long-term strategies to support the DSU Food Bank operations, both during and beyond the pandemic.

"I think that relationship has been helpful for understanding how the food bank works and has really helped us from a planning perspective create more of a partnership with the volunteers and the food bank manager who are the ones actually providing the service to students," Wright said. "I'm grateful for that because I think we now have a longer-term plan for sustaining the food bank and making sure that beyond the pandemic we can be offering this support for students."

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# International students frustrated in hotel quarantine

## Dal imposes hefty mandatory self-isolation expenses

BY LANE HARRISON, NEWS EDITOR



MEALS AND SNACKS ARE DELIVERED ON CHAIRS LINING THE HALLS OF THE WESTIN NOVA SCOTIAN HOTEL. MANY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ARE PROTESTING THESE SELF-ISOLATION CONDITIONS. (PHOTO BY JULIA LINHARES SANTOS)

One constant has remained throughout this unpredictable virtual academic year at Dalhousie University: international students are still paying the most tuition and receiving the least support.

After paying double the price of their Canadian classmates in undergraduate tuition, international students returning to Halifax this winter are being forced to pay hundreds of dollars to complete a 14-day self-isolation at the Westin Nova Scotian hotel in downtown Halifax.

The total cost for the isolation is \$1,627. Dal is covering 50 per cent of the cost for students returning to Canada for the first time since the pandemic began, according to the Dalhousie website.

This fee has created frustration for the many students who are already paying rent in apartments or houses in Halifax where they could be isolating. This frustration is only worsened by the fact Canadian students returning to Nova Scotia from provinces with high COVID-19 infection

rates, such as Ontario, can isolate in their homes with no supervision.

“It did feel like a breach of trust,” said Noah Kivler, a second-year music student from Maine who was isolating at the Westin when he spoke to the *Dalhousie Gazette*.

Kivler created a Change.org petition calling for the university to refund students. It currently has more than 2,500 signatures.

“I feel like we’re entitled to be protected from unfair treatment like that,” Kivler said.

### No clear reasoning from Dal

Dalhousie’s decision to quarantine students in the Westin hotel was made to comply with regulations put forward by Nova Scotia Public Health for the return of international students. The provincial public health guidelines mandate students need to be supervised at their place of isolation. Verity Turpin, Dal’s acting vice provost of student affairs, and Cynthia Murphy, director of student experience, outlined these rules in an email to international students, which was forwarded to the *Gazette*.

In an email to the CBC, provincial spokesperson Marla MacInnis said provincial regulations “do not prohibit international students from quarantining in private accommodation.”

Other schools in the province have found ways to allow international students to isolate in their own homes. At Acadia University, students receive a daily visit from university staff to ensure they’re still isolating.

According to Dal’s email to international students, “providing the necessary supervision to hundreds of international students throughout the Halifax Regional Municipality and the province was not possible.”

Despite this fact, in their email to international students, Dal explained they are able to allocate \$400,000 toward paying 50 per cent of the self-isolation cost for students returning to Canada for the first time since the pandemic began, as well as \$100,000 in financial aid for students who struggle to pay the quarantine fees.

Dal’s explanation left Kivler unsatisfied.

“What is stopping them from paying the extra \$300,000 so we don’t have to deal with this expense?” Kivler said.

Dalhousie did not provide the *Gazette* with an interview for this story. The *Gazette* sent Dalhousie a list of questions regarding this story with Kivler’s question included. However, the university did not directly respond to Kivler’s question.

In an email to the *Gazette* Janet Bryson, Dal’s associate director of media relations and issues management, restated the financial supports of \$400,000 and \$100,000 available to students.

The university did provide a direct response to one question, which asked if Dal had calculated the price of having students isolate at their private residences. Bryson said the university did not calculate this cost. Due to the provincial regulations “there was no ability for students to isolate in their home,” she said in her email to the *Gazette*.

### An unfair financial burden

Arriving in Halifax and facing this unexpected expense has further complicated a difficult situation for many students. Anaik Chacón, a third-year computer science student from El Salvador, returned to Halifax to complete her co-op employment. She previously believed this job would help pay for tuition and rent, but the hotel quarantine fees will take away some of that money she planned to use for living and tuition expenses.

“So that means that I’ll have to, you know, eventually do something else other than co-op or any job that I currently have to gain that money back,” Chacón said in an interview with the *Gazette* while she was isolating at the Westin.

Chacón’s financial hardship is compounded by the fact she pays international tuition fees at Dalhousie. Despite having recently been awarded a scholarship, Chacón is still financially struggling.

“When I received [the scholarship], I cried so much because I was like, ‘I won’t have to beg my parents for money, or I won’t have to overwork myself in three jobs just to try to get my rent paid and my tuition paid.’ It’s a very big blessing, but at the same time, it probably pays for one semester,” she said.

Julia Linhares Santos, a third-year student from Brazil who was isolating at the Westin when the *Gazette* interviewed her, said she understands why the hotel fees exist as students isolating in their own homes still have to pay for the

delivery of groceries and other supplies.

But Linhares Santos is frustrated in paying both the hotel fees and rent on an empty apartment she had planned to isolate in. Even with Dalhousie splitting the cost, her two-week self-isolation costs more than one month of rent.

### A fancy prison

According to Linhares Santos, students have little freedom while in isolation. They are confined to their rooms for 23 hours a day, with one supervised walk in the parking lot from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. Security guards are on each floor of the hotel to ensure students are maintaining quarantine.

Because Chacón has been working full-time in her co-op position while isolating, she has often had to sacrifice her outdoor time to attend virtual meetings with her co-workers.

“During the night, sometimes, I would feel very stressed because I was like, ‘Wow, this is my second or third day that I haven’t gone outside because I’ve had a meeting at 2 p.m.,’” she said.

While students isolating in their own homes are not permitted to go for walks in public, they are permitted to use their backyard or balcony whenever they please, something Chacón said she would prefer.

Being in the hotel room has also been a detriment to Chacón’s mental health, as she has struggled with claustrophobia since she was a child, something she says is worsened by being in the same room all day.

Linhares Santos struggles with anxiety, which she knew would be an issue during her isolation, though she hoped the issue would be solved by isolating with her Ontarian roommate in their apartment.

Once isolating in the hotel, Linhares Santos said she lost all motivation to complete her course work.

“You just want to lay in bed and do nothing because you can’t do anything else. I can’t explain it,” she said.

In terms of mental health support, Dalhousie provided students with a small bag of items that included phone numbers for both the Dal Student Health and Wellness Centre and other services like Kids Help Phone. The bag also included condoms, which confused some students.

“To me, that doesn’t give me a message of: ‘Stay alone in your room,’” said Chacón.

For Chacón, the feeling of being imprisoned is amplified by the manner in which students receive their meals. Students receive three meals a day, which are placed on a chair outside their doors. The meals have recently begun to include small snacks such as an apple, according to Linhares Santos.

Breakfast is supposed to be delivered by 9 a.m., lunch by 1 p.m. and dinner by 6:30 p.m.

“But that’s not what has been happening at all. Usually they’re late for all of them,” said Linhares Santos.

Students are not permitted to bring food into the

hotel with them, meaning full-price Westin room service is the only option for hungry students between their scheduled meals.

Even though she considers herself to have a small appetite, Chacón said she often finds herself hungry late at night after having the three full meals.

In response to concerns regarding portion size, the hotel is now doing spot checks on meals to ensure students are adequately fed according to Glenn Bowie, regional director of sales and marketing for New Castle Hotels and Resorts, who own and operate the Westin Nova Scotian.

“By North American standards, and I think we’re pretty big eaters on a worldwide spectrum, we are giving very fair portions,” Bowie said in an interview with the *Gazette*.

### The DSU press release and Westin response

On Jan. 8, the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) published a press release “calling out Dalhousie and [the] provincial government’s inequitable treatment of international students in isolation.”

According to the release, the main issue in the eyes of the DSU is the difference in treatment of international students and domestic students.

The release raised multiple concerns regarding the treatment of students at the Westin, such as “lack of adequate food, heating or internet connection.” It also said students have stated “Westin staff have ignored and avoided them while eagerly assisting other guests.”

“We treat every guest exactly the same,” Bowie said, mentioning the front desk staff is often overwhelmed by the number of calls they receive, making it difficult to respond to students.

“Quite frankly, the people at the front desk wouldn’t even know if [the people calling] are or are not isolation students,” Bowie said.

In response to concerns about heating, Bowie said one student had issues after improperly using their thermostat. After the Westin was alerted to the issue, two engineers surveyed the hotel and found heating issues on one floor that did not house students, according to Bowie.

Similarly, Bowie said the majority of internet issues were the result of user error, aside from one instance where a student had to change rooms due to a poor connection.

“We always have to remember that our job is a simple one: It’s to keep Nova Scotians and the isolation students safe,” Bowie said.

### DSU calls on Dal to do better

In an interview with the *Gazette*, DSU President Maddie Stinson said Dal’s actions “play into the sentiment that international students can’t be trusted, that they’re not going to abide by the rules. And for some reason, they’re more dangerous in a context of COVID-19 than our domestic students are.”

The DSU would like to see other avenues explored for international student isolation in the future, Stinson said. As the largest university in the province, Stinson is specifically calling on Dal to use more of its influence with the provincial government to advocate for students.

“It really comes down to, does Dal want to be an institution or does it want to be a part of our community?” Stinson said.

The only other option for self-isolating international students Dal has expressed interest in so far is using an on-campus residence, Stinson said. After the DSU press release was published and directly sent to Dal’s senior administration, Stinson hopes conversations will continue.



SELF-ISOLATING STUDENT JULIA LINHARES SANTOS SHARED THIS PHOTO WITH THE DALHOUSIE GAZETTE OF A TYPICAL MEAL PROVIDED FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT THE WESTIN. (PHOTO BY JULIA LINHARES SANTOS)



ALTHOUGH THREE MEALS A DAY ARE PROVIDED, STUDENTS HAVE COMPLAINED ABOUT LATE DELIVERY AND THE SMALL SIZE OF PORTIONS. (PHOTO BY JULIA LINHARES SANTOS)

# Eyes to the skies in a global pandemic

## Students search for answers in astrology

BY MANDY KING

With the COVID-19 pandemic throwing the world upside down, some people may completely disavow the idea of fate. But the abundance of destruction caused by COVID-19 has not shaken the faith of Dalhousie University students who are fans of astrology.

Astrology is the study of planetary influence on human lives. Though modern science does not support astrology, the idea of stars and planets effecting humanity has been around for thousands of years. There are several variants from mainstream astrology such as sidereal astrology and Vedic astrology from India.

### Astrology in a pandemic

With many university programs continuing online into 2021, one might assume students are becoming less optimistic about the planet's plans for them. However, some Dal students continue to watch the skies with keen eyes.

Darcy Gillespie, a second-year sustainability major and an Aquarius, thinks discussions about astrology have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

"I definitely see people talking about [astrology] less as horoscopes and more as influential, rather than predicting," Gillespie says. "I think with everybody in isolation it may have brought on a lot of introspection. I know that definitely happened to me."

Gillespie, who began learning about astrology during an elementary girl's summer camp, says she didn't fully understand her astrological chart (a.k.a. horoscope), or even look into it until COVID-19. After some researching, she finds it fascinating how unique every individual's chart is and how accurate hers can be.

When asked if she believes her zodiac sign reflects her personality, Gillespie says, "100 per cent yes! Aquarius is described as being very independent and I really resonate with that. I guess Aquarius tries to steer off the beaten path and I find myself on a path that people around me don't always follow."

### Consulting Co-Star

For Viola Bolik, a fourth-year economics major at Dalhousie, her consumption of daily horoscopes has also increased since the start of the pandemic. While she does not believe in the veracity of horoscopes, she says, "Sometimes horoscopes can give you a remind-



WHAT DO THE STARS HOLD IN STORE FOR YOU? SOME DALHOUSIE STUDENTS ARE ENJOYING AN INCREASED INTEREST IN ASTROLOGY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. (PHOTO BY MIRA COSIC ON PIXABAY)

er, or a push to do something, or make you think about the way you act."

Bolik is a Scorpio with a rising Virgo and says some of her zodiac sign traits are accurate, while others are not.

"I relate to a few of the traits. I am definitely passionate, determined, independent and reserved," says Bolik. Her connection to astrology during COVID-19 also has a social role.

"As the pandemic started, a lot of my friends started to download Co-Star, so I did as well. My view hasn't really changed, but I definitely read my horoscope more now than I did before," says Bolik.

Co-Star is an astrology app, which has been featured on websites like *Vogue*. The app provides information on people's star signs and charts, updating daily with personalized predictions and information. With many gathering restrictions in place due to COVID-19, university students may find an otherwise lost social connection through astrology with apps like Co-Star.

"Sometimes Co-Star can be scary accurate," Bolik says. "It'll tell me something that's super poi-

gnant to me at that time and it's a little freaky. Sometimes it says some really funny or obscure things that I love to share with my friends, and we have a good laugh from it."

### Some remain unconvinced

Not all students have caught the astrology bug during the pandemic. April Curl, a third-year Dalhousie student says she was more interested in astrology in her youth than she is now.

"If I am reading a paper and there's a horoscope in the back, I'll look at it, but I wouldn't buy the paper for the horoscope or anything," Curl says.

Curl believes her Aries star sign describes her in some ways, but it could also relate to any other sign or person. Still, she's had some brief encounters with astrology since COVID-19 struck as she continues to check what her horoscope says from time to time.

In times of peril people react in quite different ways. Whether astrology holds any accuracy or not, it appears some students at Dalhousie are using it to connect, contemplate and look inward.

Overall, astrology could be a genuine path to social connection through shared interest. So, even for the skeptics, maybe it's worth a shot to check out your astrological chart. Let's just hope all our horoscopes for 2021 are looking up.

**"I think with everybody in isolation it may have brought on a lot of introspection. I know that definitely happened to me."**

# The Queen's Gambit is transforming chess

## Netflix's hit show moves local players

BY MADISON SCANLAN



LOCAL CHESS GROUPS ARE ENCOURAGING STUDENTS FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS TO GET INTO THE GAME. (PHOTO BY GEOFFREY HOWARD)

The hit Netflix chess drama *The Queen's Gambit* may be set in mid-century Kentucky, but it's resonating with chess players in Halifax today.

### A renewed interest in chess

*The Queen's Gambit* follows protagonist Beth Harmon: an orphan who becomes a chess prodigy thanks to early lessons from the janitor in the basement of her orphanage. The series deals with substance abuse, mental health issues, sexism and other serious subjects.

But most of all, the show is about chess. The acclaimed series has caused a major boost in curiosity about the game.

While the COVID-19 pandemic already sparked an increase in the general public's interest in chess, when *The Queen's Gambit* was released interest skyrocketed. The *New York Times* reported the sale of chess games shot up 125 per cent in the weeks following the October 2020 release of the Netflix show. One toy company,

Goliath Games, saw more than 1,000 per cent increase in chess sales since *The Queen's Gambit* came out. Chess.com has gained several million new users to its website since last October.

Ken Cashin, president of Chess Nova Scotia, has also seen a recent rise in chess interest in the province and hopes "any new interest will translate into more people coming out to [their] chess clubs and tournaments. . . once things open back up."

**"I think things are changing and I'm hoping more girls get into chess because it's a game for everyone."**

### Accuracies and inaccuracies

For Aaron Yip, a Dalhousie University engineering alumnus who started the Dalhousie Chess Club in

2018, says *The Queen's Gambit* highlights the social aspects of chess he has come to love.

"Players love to get together and talk about moves and openings like they do in the Netflix series," says Yip.

Sex and gender discrimination are major themes throughout *The Queen's Gambit*. It's inspiring to watch Harmon destroy her oppo-

nents at all-male competitions. For Ridhi Mittal, a former Nova Scotia provincial chess champion and current first-year student at McGill University, *The Queen's Gambit* reminds her how little the chess world has changed: When she attends tournaments, she is often one of few, if not the only woman there.

"This can be discouraging to girls when they see that there aren't many female role models within the chess community," Mittal says. "But I think things are changing and I'm hoping more girls get into chess because it's a game for everyone."

Although the reviews for the Netflix show were overwhelmingly positive, with the show receiving 97 per cent on Rotten Tomatoes, some critics were quick to point out its flaws.

Bethonie Butler of the *Washington Post* points out the show has only one major Black character, Jolene, whose "backstory and character development are so limited," says Butler, "that she seems to exist merely to make Beth's life easier." Other critics said the show misrepresents drug abuse.

### What's next for local chess

Unfortunately, the pandemic has halted in-person chess tournaments around the globe.

"It has taken the social aspect out of it," Yip says. "It's become much more individual."

Yip said when he was in the Dal Chess Club, they worked to get equal ratios of male and female players. They once hosted a seminar on famous female chess players for this reason, but it's not an easy task to create gender equality in chess. Yip is hopeful once in-person games resume post-pandemic, more players, and more women, will show up.

"It doesn't matter what your social status is, what your gender is, doesn't matter how rich or poor you are, the game is for everyone," Yip says.

For Mittal the best thing about chess, which comes across in *The Queen's Gambit*, is how unpredictable it can be.

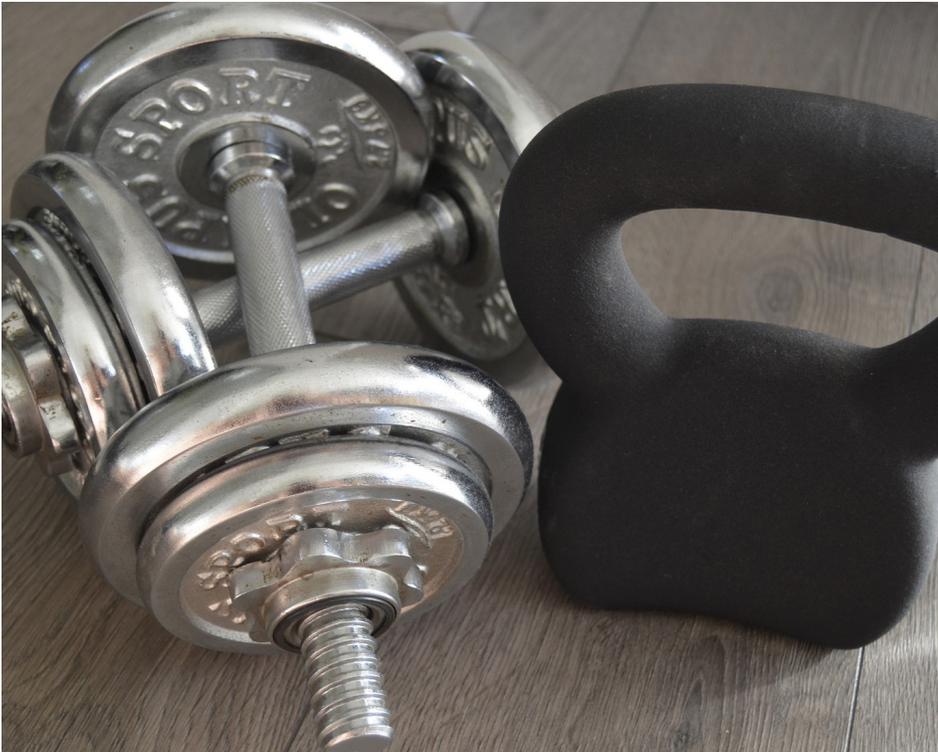
"Every time I play a game it's something different, something unique," says Mittal, who's been playing chess for 12 years and held the title as a Nova Scotia grade champion for five years.

"There are more possible chess games than stars in the galaxy," says Mittal.

# Working out during a pandemic

## Three ways to keep active indoors

BY BROOKE SCHIDOWKA



STUCK AT HOME WITH NO ACCESS TO WEIGHTS AND OTHER GYM EQUIPMENT? NEVER FEAR: THERE ARE ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO WORK OUT INDOORS. (PHOTO BY CLARADOOLAK ON PIXABAY)

Life during the current COVID-19 pandemic has often felt anything but active — unless you count walking from your bedroom to the fridge 10 times a day.

It can be hard to get out of bed in these depressing times, let alone find motivation to stay physically active. But for those looking to take on an exercise challenge while they're stuck at home, or anyone looking for effective alternatives to their classic burpee and jumping jack routine, here are some unique workouts to try.

### Start with a dance

For beginners looking for an effective but not too intense way to stay moving at home, meet your perfect match: dance fitness.

Watch a video or two from the YouTube channel MadFit run by Maddie Lymburner, who creates coordinated work-

outs to your favourite hit songs. Dancing to Ariana Grande or Justin Bieber is the perfect beginner level fitness activity at home. MadFit's dance fitness workouts, and many other dance workout videos on YouTube, have graspable choreography and light cardio, which give you an enjoyable yet effective means of staying active through a personal dance party.

### A big HIIT

Those who are seeking to challenge their bodies more intensely without being at the gym will find high-intensity interval

training (HIIT) ideal. HIIT is a type of exercise routine involving short intervals of intense workout mixed with intervals of more moderate workout. For example, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology's seven-week HIIT program includes a 19-minute workout where you jog for 10 minutes, run quickly for another four minutes, then cool down for five.

Caroline Girvan on YouTube has several HIIT-based fitness video series, which range from one week to 50 day-challenges. The daily challenge aspect of Girvan's HIIT series allows for accountability and inspiration to stay consistently active while at home.

### Mind and body

If you are interested in a challenge for both your mind and body, yoga is a must try.

According to the American Psychological Association, mindfulness practices such as yoga, qigong and tai chi can reduce stress, boost memory and lower emotional reactivity among other benefits.

Yoga With Adriene, another YouTube channel, curates a wide variety of yoga practices from strengthening your self-awareness to strengthening your muscles. Adriene Mishler's channel includes yoga practices for heart health, courage, lower back pain and many other topics.

Dance, HIIT, yoga: These three forms of fitness are each unique in action and benefits, but are all special in their ability to be accomplished at home. By simply choosing to stay active during a global pandemic

means you have already done the hardest part. The rest will benefit your physical and mental health, and of course, it adds a little amusement to otherwise banal days. So, are you ready to get moving?

**“Mindfulness practices such as yoga, qigong and tai chi can reduce stress, boost memory and lower emotional reactivity.”**

# Dal athletes score new school record

## Academic excellence goes hand in hand with team players

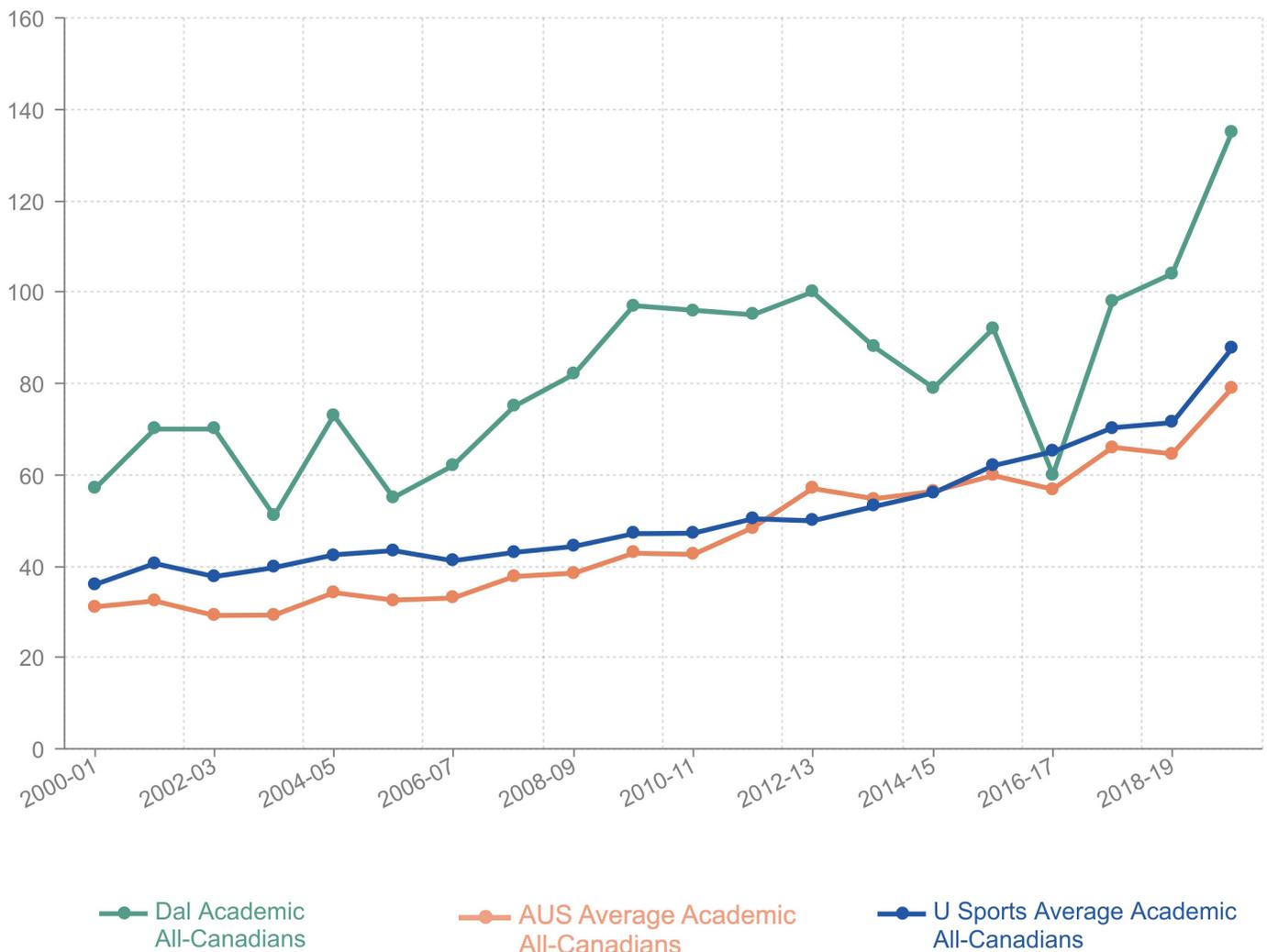
BY LUKE DYMENT, SPORTS EDITOR

In the 2019-2020 season, the Dalhousie University Tigers boasted the highest number of Academic All-Canadians in school history and the most in the Atlantic University Sport (AUS). Student-athletes are recognized as Academic All-Canadians by U Sports when they achieve an overall grade of 80 per cent or better (3.7 GPA or above on Dal's grade scale) while playing with a varsity team.

Dal had 135 Academic All-Canadians last season, a jump of 29.8 per

cent from 2018-2019. Since 2013, Dal has seen a mostly upward trend in their number of Academic All-Canadian athletes, except for an outlier year of 60 recipients in 2016-2017.

Since the commendation was introduced in 1988, the 2019-2020 season marked the year U Sports as a whole saw the most athletes ever recognized as Academic All-Canadians. In total, across all participating Canadian universities, there were 4,910 U Sports Academic All-Canadians last season.



SOURCE: [HTTPS://USPORTS.CA/EN/AWARDS/ACADEMIC-ALL-CANADIANS](https://usports.ca/en/awards/academic-all-canadians)

# Dalplex sees attendance drop, but not from lack of interest

## Pandemic imposes restrictions on facility use

BY LUKE DYMENT, SPORTS EDITOR



DESPITE A DROP IN USAGE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THERE IS STILL INTEREST FROM STUDENTS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY TO USE DALPLEX. (PHOTO BY GEOFFREY HOWARD)

Due to COVID-19, a large drop-off in the number of people using Dalplex was expected during Dalhousie University's 2020 fall semester. However Kathie Wheadon, Dal's athletics facilities director, said the gym had a strong semester despite fewer people coming through the door.

Wheadon said Dalplex's usage has dropped about 77 per cent from 48,300 users in September 2019 to 10,973 in September 2020. Although fewer students returned to Halifax last semester

for virtual classes, gym demand remained relatively high. Appointments, now required for Dalplex users, filled quickly during peak times of the day and overall were filled more than 90 per cent of the time during September 2020.

"Before, we could have 200 people upstairs in the fitness hall. Right now, there's only 30 allowed," said Wheadon, adding that currently a fully booked week at Dalplex accommodates 2,774 users. Appointments for most Dalplex activities are an hour long with cleaning done between appointments.

Wheadon said last semester was characterized by "learning a new system very quickly." A major part of this new system was establishing the

online appointment booking requirement, checking in Dalplex users who booked appointments at the door, screening for COVID-19 and enforcing public health protocols.

Dalplex aimed to improve its service during the semester by surveying what equipment was popular with users to best suit their needs.

"We're happy with the setup we have here while trying to increase some opportunities upstairs. Dumbbell workouts seem to be popular so we've added more,"

Wheadon said. "We're trying to listen where we can while considering all kinds of things with every decision."

### Varsity teams' use of Dalplex

Brett Armstrong is the strength and conditioning coach of a few Dal Tigers teams. Although there aren't any games this year, Armstrong's been just as busy, if not busier, working with athletes at Dalplex.

"Teams are around the weight room more this year than the field or court. More time spent in there would be in place of watching games or taking part in competitions," Armstrong said.

"He has put in a ton of hours helping the teams train. I think Brett is ready to move his

apartment to Dalplex," said Wheadon. As entire teams cannot train together due to COVID-19 protocols, Armstrong holds many sessions with small gathering numbers to accommodate as many athletes as possible.

Another difference for varsity athletes is not using multiple facilities at once. For instance, in a training session teams might be in the weight room and then head to the track for other workouts whenever they please. But now, for contact tracing purposes and gathering restrictions, the weight room, track and pool have limited appointment time-slots.

"It's less busy and crowded, which isn't as great because you want to have a lot of people there. It brings positive energy," Armstrong said.

Returning from the winter break, Armstrong is tasked with getting student-athletes training again after weeks of less activity. With many coming out of self-isolation after travelling, Armstrong is diligent when getting players back in action.

"With students coming back [in the fall] after being in five months of lockdown from all over Canada, that was the toughest part this year: getting them going again. The winter break is busy for that too. Student-athletes want to jump right back in and there are always some injuries, but it's similar to other years," Armstrong said.

### Where Dalplex stands now

Only gym members, including full-time Dal students, varsity athletes and resident clubs like the Halifax Trojans Swim Club, are permitted to use Dalplex right now. Single and multi-day passes aren't being sold at this point.

Even with fewer people in the gym, Dalplex had a lot to consider for their operations this unique school year. They had to account for various teams' schedules plus provincial and team-specific COVID-19 protocols. Wheadon said they've created student jobs to fill needs like checking users into Dalplex, cleaning equipment and monitoring protocols.

"There are challenges along the way too with people's frustrations with COVID, but right now this is how we have to work in order to serve as many people as we can," Wheadon said. "Safety is first and foremost and we'll expand our offerings only when it makes sense to do so."

**"Before, we could have 200 people upstairs in the fitness hall. Right now, there's only 30 allowed."**

# Tigers extend training season

## Cancelled games means changing team focus

BY LUKE DYMENT, SPORTS EDITOR

A major local sports casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic is Atlantic University Sport's (AUS) regular season.

In November, the conference announced it would not sanction a season and only member-driven competition may be possible in the winter semester. Like the fall semester, teams will be limited to training and maybe some exhibition games.

The winter semester will largely be what teams make of it. With that, Rick Plato, the Dalhousie University Tigers men's basketball team's head coach, set a goal for the extended off-season.

"I told the guys in September that we would come out of this [break] better than any school in the country," said the coach of the 2020 U Sports men's basketball Final 8 silver medallists.

Dal teams have had the fortune to practice together for nearly the whole first semester and several teams are back from the winter break ready to pick up from where they left off in the fall. Compared to the rest of Canada, including regions subject to lockdowns, Tigers teams have trained together more than most U Sports schools. At the same time, some athletes hoped season play would be underway by now.

"Me and my teammates had a lot of optimism at the beginning of the season. We thought there might be a chance. When we got the news that we wouldn't be playing, it kind of took us by surprise," said Kelly Bent of the men's hockey team. "But we still expected it in a way. The [Halifax] Mooseheads weren't playing and minor hockey was in and out of playing [when the announcement was made]."

Tigers track and field team member Lorena Heubach said her team saw the announcement coming when COVID-19 cases rose in Atlantic Canada in early November.

"The coaches came up with a mock competition schedule to make up for the season. This way, we're still able to have competitions within the team and we can set goals for the season," said the reigning AUS women's field athlete of the year.

### Another semester of challenges

Student-athletes and coaches said they've slowed things down this season. Rather than actively preparing for game after game, individual skills and team building have garnered more focus. Bent said the hockey team is on the ice about three times a week instead of the usual five practices and some games.

"I really feel for the young guys on the team because the team's together less," Bent said. "It's



TIME TO TRAIN: WITH THE CANCELLATION OF THE AUS SEASON, MANY TIGERS VIEW THIS YEAR AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO HONE THEIR SKILLS. (PHOTO BY EVAN DE SILVA)

tough for them. You come into a new university, you want to be around the guys, you want to get to know your teammates and practice with them. We still get to meet each other, but it's been a tough year."

Motivation, Heubach said, is hard to come by in a year without regular competition or routine preparation for competition.

"Training has been low-key. It's hard to stay on my game and on training schedules because health regulations are changing. We had a consistent training schedule going in the fall, and then gyms shut down and we couldn't practice anymore. You pretty well have to start that training cycle again," she said. "I'm in quarantine, so that's two weeks of less physical exercise, which isn't good for training either. Getting started again is another challenge too, especially without that real end goal."

Student-athletes have remained committed to their teams throughout the pandemic. Last spring, some team meetings and training happened over Zoom and now many players are returning to Halifax for the season's second half. Plato said his players remain disciplined and showed maturity despite adversity.

"I can't say enough about how committed and mature everyone has been. You'll see on the news about how students are partying and all that, but we know we can't do that," Plato said. "Most of the guys, those in residence anyway, their life is staying in their room and studying. They'll go to the gym. They'll go the weight room, and then back and forth."

"The whole routine's different too. Campus is like a ghost town. No one's around. We don't have the chance to have team meals in residence. Recruits can't come visit and we would have played almost 20 games by now. It's different, challenging and disappointing. But it's the reality of what it is. We have to cope with it."

### Team building

Much like during a rough patch in a season, players build character, which in turn improves entire teams. Improvement has emerged as a theme for many Tigers this year, whether it's coming out of the cancelled season as the best in the country or simply as better versions of themselves.

"We're looking to come out of this with more resilience and a team dynamic. It's harder to get together as a team and build those relationships you would normally have with them," Heubach said about challenges she and her team want to address this winter. "Hopefully, in this time, we can still bring the team together more in some way."

Bent said he believes the chance to take a step back and use this year to improve in practice will pay off in the standings next year.

"We had the opportunity to practice as a team this year where other schools, even in Atlantic Canada, didn't. We've been lucky to be around one another since we're COVID-free so far," he said. "The young guys can still get a good experience from it and learn from this."

Introducing new players to the program is important this season for Plato too. He said this advantage is perhaps the largest positive with few other schools in Canada training right now.

"One of the team's biggest assets is our chemistry and how everyone gets along. Our young guys have the opportunity not just to get to know the other guys, but learn how we do things around here and get used to playing at the university level," Plato said. "I've been pleasantly surprised. It won't be long until our older players are done, so by the time they all go, the younger guys are ready to take over. There's no question we'll come out of this a lot stronger."

# Passing the ball

## Volleyball teammates jump at setter competition

BY LUKE DYMENT, SPORTS EDITOR



GAME ON: ANIKA ALMERO (PICTURED, NUMBER 17) IS COMPETING FOR THE VACANT SETTER POSITION, PREVIOUSLY HELD BY THREE-TIME AUS MVP COURTNEY BAKER, ON DAL'S WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL TEAM. (PHOTO BY EVAN DE SILVA)

Anika Almero and Brett Boldon aim to be the best volleyball setters they can be.

The teammates for the Dalhousie University Tigers women's volleyball team are competing for the vacant starting setter position in preparation for regular games potentially resuming next season. The position was held by Courtney Baker, a three-time Atlantic University Sport (AUS) MVP and the reigning U Sports women's volleyball Player of the Year. Baker graduated from Dal last year.

Baker certainly set the bar high for her successors at the position, but Boldon and Almero are determined to rise to the challenge.

"I'm working to be the best I can be. Courtney's an incredible player, but there's only one of her and only one of me," Boldon said. "I'm going to play my game and help my team win another championship."

In her rookie year last season, Almero trained with Baker. The experience helped Almero improve her own game.

"It was amazing to have [Baker] guide me on the team when I started. She definitely set the bar high, but I'm working hard because of that, so when I step out onto the court, I'm ready to help my team," she said. "One of my first thoughts taking this next step was 'I'm going to be the best Anika Almero I can be.'"

### Intense competition

With the eight-time defending AUS champion Tigers, there has been no shortage of hard practicing and training in a season hindered by COVID-19. One word sums up the team's approach to this season: intensity.

"Training has been fun because even without actual competition, it's been intense and competitive," Almero said.

"It's a huge jump from high school in terms of volume and pace, but I love it so far," said Boldon, who's in her first year at Dalhousie.

"The whole team is super intense and passionate about the sport like me."

There's been no lack of intensity in competition for the setter position, Boldon added.

"It's a super positive competition with Anika. We practice together quite a bit. It's a grind to get everything done and to put the work in with her pushing me, but it's a good relationship," Boldon said.

"When I think about the best me, it's work-

ing hard every day and always putting in effort. As long as I'm showing I'm ready to go and prepared, I feel I'm giving myself my best chance to get a starting role. But it's also being there to support my teammates," Almero said. "When I'm feeling confident, I try to boost everyone else up as well and keep a good mentality going around."

### Team players

At the beginning of the season, Head Coach Rick Scott talked with Almero and Boldon to ensure their focus would be on their own game and goals instead of trying to be the next Baker.

"[Baker] was a great player on the team, but they need to be the best versions of themselves," Scott said. "They don't need to be anyone else, but instead getting better as the best Brett Boldon and the best Anika Almero."

Almero and Boldon said the relationships with their teammates has motivated them to be as successful as possible. Working with them and finding out where to improve has allowed them to identify their biggest strengths.

"I've found more confidence in myself. When I first began [as a rookie] last year, it was nerve-racking. Now I feel more confident and improved skill wise," Almero said. "I'm able to work on these without being as rushed or pressured with the break from games this year."

Boldon said she uses her shorter height to define her own playing style as a setter.

"At my height, my style of play would be different from taller players. It comes with confidence in yourself and being able to adapt," Boldon said. "Plus, I'm a really encouraging teammate. I'd say I like to hype my team up."

Boldon said Scott told her to remember three points while competing for a spot on the Tigers: "Be true to yourself, play your game and know you can do it if you put the work in."

**"It's a super positive competition with Anika. . . It's a grind to get everything done and to put the work in with her pushing me, but it's a good relationship."**