



July 19 '21

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OTTAWA AT THE OLYMPICS

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Event: Women's 76 kg
Age: 32
Hometown: Stittsville
Residence: Calgary
Local Club: National Capital Wrestling Club
Second Olympics

ERICA WIEBE WRESTLING



@eweebz

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Reigning champ's focus is performing

By Martin Cleary

Technically speaking, Stittsville wrestler Erica Wiebe is the defending champion in the women's top weight class for the Tokyo Olympics, after taking gold in her 2016 Games debut in Rio.

But if you mention that to her, she may take offence, toss you onto the competitive mat and pin you for another one of her career victories. For Wiebe, her second Olympics as a Team Canada athlete is like starting all over again.

"I'm not trying to defend my Olympic gold. The medal is up for grabs," said Wiebe, who actually attended the 2012 Summer Olympics as the training partner for Canadian teammate Leah Callahan.

Wiebe is ranked No. 5 in the world in the women's 76-kilogram division behind Estonia's Epp Mae, No. 1; Germany's Aline Rotter Focken, No. 2; Russia's Natalia Vorobeveva, No. 3; and Kazakhstan's Elmira Sydykova, No. 4.



PHOTO: STEVE KINGSMAN

Five years after winning the Olympic gold medal in the women's 75-kilogram class in Rio, Wiebe will face a highly accomplished field of wrestlers, including five-time world champion Adeline Gray of the United States.

Gray, who was upset in the Rio quarterfinals, and Vorobeveva, an Olympic gold (72 kg, 2012) and silver (69 kg, 2016) medallist, will be tough competitors. And Mae

recently defeated Vorobeveva for the 2021 European championship.

"That [gold medal] is never the goal," Wiebe added in a telephone interview. "It's about having the best performances that day. That's what I focus on. If I can be my best, I'll be champion."

Reaching her second Summer Olympics took five instead of four years this time because the Games were postponed a year by the COVID-19 pandemic. But a lot has happened in that half decade that pulled Wiebe in many directions.

In the wake of becoming the second Canadian woman and third national-team member to win an Olympic wrestling gold, she was busy making appearances, being honoured and speaking to thousands of school children across Canada.

For one season, she competed in a highly popular wrestling league in India and fared well. On the other end, she was invited to explore the inner workings of professional wrestling for a possible World Wrestling Entertainment

career.

After winning a bronze medal at the 2018 world championships, Wiebe was hit with a series of injuries, requiring seven X-ray sessions and three MRIs. But she's a constant competitor and took another bronze at the 2019 Pan American Championships.

Then the pandemic struck and the sports world came to a standstill. But as that was happening, Wiebe attended the 2020 Pan Am Olympic qualification tournament in Ottawa in mid-March and won the women's 76-kilogram competition.

For the next 10 months, competitions were cancelled and training was difficult because of local health and safety restrictions, especially those related to physical distancing. But Wiebe learned to carry on in a different way.

"The pandemic was tough early on, mentally, socially and with physical distancing," she said. "Clearly, you couldn't train or wrestle. You had to find a way to do it safely. I had to find ways to stay positive."

Wiebe shook up her life significantly April 7, 2020, when she bought a road cycling bicycle, which she added to her training routine.

"I learned a new skill," she added. "I found a new passion being outdoors. It helped me stabilize mentally."

If that wasn't enough to keep Wiebe busy during the one-year Olympic postponement, she decided to pursue an Executive MBA through Cornell University and the Smith School of Business at Queen's University.

"There's so much out there. It's a great opportunity to have something tangible," said Wiebe, who already has two university degrees and earned a scholarship to take her MBA through the Canadian Olympic Committee's Game Plan program.

As the Olympics approach and the highs and lows of the past five years become building blocks for her next major assignment, Wiebe looks positively toward Tokyo.

"I'll be ready no matter what," she said defiantly.



Age: 25
Hometown: Ottawa
Residence: Bordeaux, France
Local Club: FC Capital United (now Ottawa TFC)
First Olympics

VANESSA GILLES FOOTBALL/SOCCER



@vanessagilles4

See local Olympians' competition schedules at: ottawasportspages.ca/events

Gold is Vanessa Gilles' goal

By Madalyn Howitt

To make it to the Olympics, many athletes start training in their chosen sport from a very young age.

Very few make the switch from a sport they excel in to an unfamiliar one at age 16.

Vanessa Gilles, however, is a born athlete, and the somewhat late-in-life shift from the tennis court to the soccer field is now paying dividends for her. Her impressive physicality and power on the pitch has earned her a well-deserved spot playing with Team Canada's women's soccer team at the 2020 Tokyo Games.

It's also that natural athleticism that is helping Gilles grow and adapt with the changing expectations of the centre-back position and giving her team a leg-up towards grabbing the gold.

"She's an amazing athlete," said Joé Fournier, who coached Gilles when she was a student athlete in Louis Riel High School's sports-study program.

"She's the strong strongest girl I've ever seen in my life, physically. When I watch her play for the national team, I can see that her athleticism is helping her a lot. You can see when she plays, she has this physical pres-



PHOTO: GERAINT WYN NICHOLAS / CANADA SOCCER

ence. She's not scared of anyone."

Initially though, Gilles struggled with her footwork when she first took up soccer. "She was really bad with her feet, and she'll be the first one to admit it," Fournier said.

Since moving on to the elite levels of the sport, Fournier said Gilles's ability to stay on the ball has improved enormously.

"Canada has a lot of depth in the cen-

tre-back position, but she is doing very well. I'm not surprised [she improved] because she has amazing commitment. Now, she can pass, break the defensive line — I even sent her a text about it," he said.

Gilles shared that having started soccer pretty late, she's most proud of having developed technically and tactically enough to be able to keep on the ball and keep up defensively.

"I've always known my defensive skills are what have allowed me to push my career to the university, pro and national levels," she said.

After being named the American Athletics Conference's Most Outstanding Defensive Player in her sophomore year at the University of Cincinnati, Gilles's talents on the defensive line continued to develop as she grew more comfortable with her position on the field.

"Over the past few years, we've seen a shift in that centre-backs are seeing a lot more of the ball and are dictating [plays] more, which is something that in the past would have scared me," said Gilles. As the game develops though, players should too, she explained.

"These days to be a good centre-back, you have to have the confidence in your ability to run and contribute to the game on the ball," Gilles said.

She credits the opportunity to play under Spanish, English and French coaches with different coaching styles for helping her gain the confidence she now has on the field.

Fournier will be watching his former student go for the gold, and said he's delighted to see Gilles achieving her soccer dreams.

"It's something that she's worked really hard for so I'm really happy for her. She has such a great personality [and is] a great ambassador for Canadian soccer," he said.

"The Olympics are always the main event, so I'm always looking forward to watching these athletes perform at the highest level," he added. "It's just so impressive to see all the work all the commitments all the sacrifices that they've made to make it there."

And this year, Gilles will have a new fan cheering her on from Fournier's couch.

"These are going to be my daughter's first Olympics that she's going to be able to interact with. She's six years old and she's a big Vanessa fan. She's always asking when there's a game, 'Is Vanessa playing?'," he laughed, "so we're really looking forward to see our national team play at the biggest tournament for women's soccer."

Gilles, of course, is thrilled to be there. "I'm most excited about competing on the greatest stage of women's football at the highest level," she said.



From your Ottawa Liberal Members of Parliament:
 De la part de vos députés libéraux d'Ottawa :

We wish all athletes in Ottawa good luck and success at the Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo!

Nous souhaitons à tous les athlètes d'Ottawa de la bonne chance et du succès aux Jeux olympiques et paralympiques de Tokyo !

 Chandra Arya Nepean Chandra.Arya@parl.gc.ca	 Francis Drouin Francis.Drouin@parl.gc.ca	 Hon. Mona Fortier Mona.Fortier@parl.gc.ca	 Marie-France Lalonde Marie-France.Lalonde@parl.gc.ca	 Karen McCrimmon Karen.McCrimmon@parl.gc.ca	 Hon. David McGuinty David.McGuinty@parl.gc.ca	 Hon. Catherine McKenna Catherine.McKenna@parl.gc.ca	 Anita Vandenbeld Anita.Vandenbeld@parl.gc.ca
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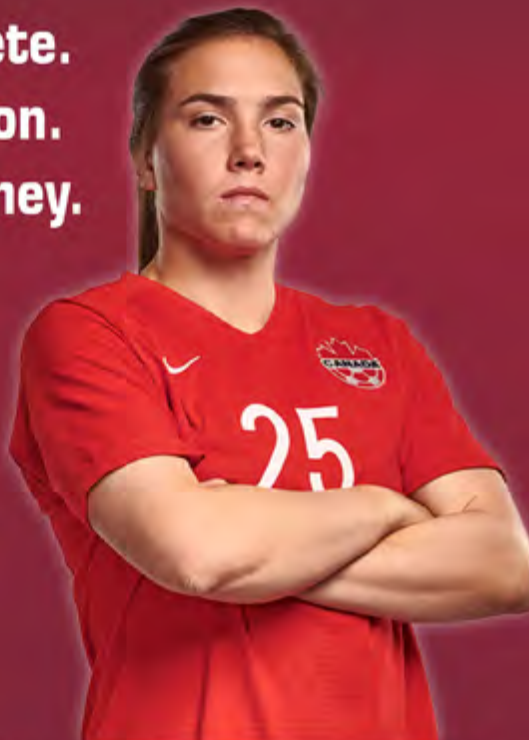
MATHIEU FLEURY
 WARD/QUARTIER RIDEAU-VANIER

Good luck to all our local athletes set to compete at the Tokyo Games!

Bonne chance à nos athlètes locaux qui vont compétitionner aux Jeux de Tokyo !

Proud to serve as Ottawa Sport Commissioner. I am here to help.
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Amazing Athlete. Amazing Person. Amazing Journey.

So proud to watch Ottawa TFC alum Vanessa Gilles go from our local pitches to the biggest stage in sport.

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Unsung Hometown Heroes

Celebrating the Special People who Drive our Sports Community

Growing for gold: Parents of Pam Buisa reflect on what it takes to raise an Olympian



with City of Ottawa Sport Commissioner Mathieu Fleury

I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to hear just how proud Pamphile Lelo Buisa and Jeannette Malonda were of their daughter – rugby star, local activist and all-around athlete Pamphinette (Pam) Buisa.

“Pam had a great childhood; she was full of energy,” Pam’s father Mr. Buisa said. “She had all the support that she needed to fulfil her potential in every aspect.”

When the family immigrated to Canada, they first moved to Vanier – a place Mr. Buisa said remains their community and considered their home neighbourhood, despite moving to Gatineau years later.

The proud father added he knew Pam was not only talented but had a calling to do well in sport – and had no worries about his daughter playing one of the roughest sports out there.

“She was very athletic, and her height, her strength and physicality were a great asset for her,” he said of Pam, who quickly became a star for the Ottawa Irish. “Instead, earlier on, the other players were afraid and scared to measure with her.”

As her father, he said he always knew Pam would go far in the sport. As he watched her progress onto the Canadian development team program in 2014, he had no doubt she would make it to the Olympics.

And his pride goes deeper than just watching her on the pitch. Rugby helped his daughter develop the confidence and strength to be a leader in her community, he highlighted.

“Pam is very disciplined and a very respectful child. She’s a very reliable individual and a bold personality. She has natural leadership for whatever she does whether in sport, work or school,” he said. “Pam’s self-confidence and social ability is effective to inspire and encourage others, radiating both passion and love for whatever she’s involved in... She’s a very reliable kid, assertive, and likes being in charge – I mean in power. She’s not afraid to voice her opinion on what is just and fair.”

When the Olympics were postponed, Pam very quickly found another focus in fighting “social inequalities” and supporting her community in Victoria, B.C., where she now lives.

“For us as a family, I think (news of the postponement) was even tougher for us to handle, especially since we were unable to be there physically to comfort her during that moment due to the geo-distance and the Covid restrictions,” he said.

As the show must go on, the family is happy the Olympics – Pam’s first – was not cancelled altogether and is looking forward to watching her succeed on the world stage.

“She gave everything she had for this. We want her to enjoy the moment and have fun over there. This is a great life experience for her,” noted Mr. Buisa. “She worked so hard and sacrificed so much to this point. We are so proud of her.”

Do you know a local sports figure we should feature in the Unsung Hometown Heroes column? Let us know! Contact:

613-580-2482 • mathieu.fleury@ottawa.ca



PAM BUISA RUGBY SEVENS

Age: 24
Hometown: Gatineau
Residence: Victoria
Local Club: Ottawa Irish
First Olympics
@pambuisa

A leader on the rugby pitch and beyond, Pam Buisa embodies the Olympic spirit

By Madalyn Howitt

Whether she’s organizing an anti-racism march through the streets of Victoria, B.C., or calling for Indigenous land acknowledgements before tournaments, Team Canada women’s rugby sevens member Pam Buisa has shown to be a natural-born leader.

The 24-year-old has already proven she’s a force to be reckoned with as an athlete. Initially starting off as a basketball player, Ottawa’s Buisa made the switch to rugby when her Grade 7 coach thought her style of aggressive play would be better suited to the hard-hitting sport. Since then, she’s thrived on the pitch, helping to lead the women’s national team to back-to-back bronze medals at the 2019 and 2020 Rugby Seven Series and bringing home a gold medal at the 2019 Pan Am Games.

As accomplished as she is though in rugby, Buisa is also an exceptional leader for social justice, fighting for causes that help advance welfare and equity. She’s used to pushing through the toughest rugby matches, and now she’s learning how to maintain that same drive and determination in her community work.

By being both an activist and an athlete, Buisa is cultivating a legacy of compassion on, and off, the rugby pitch.

“Energy can be given and taken away,” said Buisa. “I think at the beginning [of the pandemic] I was very much figuring out how to balance out my energy and be intentional with where I [was] applying it.”

When lockdowns meant team practices and games were limited, much of Buisa’s energy went towards community engagement and education. During the past year, Buisa organized anti-racism rallies in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and began working at the Howard Johnson hotel in Victoria when it became a temporary housing shelter for people experiencing homelessness and displacement.

Since graduating from the University of Victoria with a degree in political science and social justice, Buisa felt equipped to jump headfirst into those worlds.

“I felt myself completely immersed in social justice. A lot of it was based on my own identity as a black cis woman,”



FILE PHOTO

she said. “The elements that I [now] find myself having to work on is that recovery component. Like, how do you take a break? How do you recharge so that you’re ready for the next thing? How do I channel my energy and my efforts in a way that is effective and intentional?” she explained.

Buisa shared that some of the most important things she’s learned about being intentional with her energy have come from the decolonial work of Indigenous leaders.

“Every single day that we step on the field we do a territory acknowledgement as part of our decolonial efforts,” she said, referring to a practice that her and her rugby sevens teammates have adopted.

“For me, [it’s about] understanding what it means to represent Canada at this level and its relationships with a lot of Indigenous communities, and just being mindful of how it’s important to acknowledge the lands that you’re on.”

This includes recognizing that Ottawa, where Buisa played with the Ottawa Irish Ruby Club, exists on unceded Algonquin Anishinaabe territory, she said.

Sean Liebich was Buisa’s coach for two years with the Irish, starting in 2014. He said while she was often busy with national team commitments, Buisa already showed tremendous leadership within the club.

“She was sort of more of a leader or coach than a player that first year, really helping the other girls develop knowledge,” he said. “And then the second year, she actually played some games which was awesome to see, and I know all the other girls took note of the things that she did on the field.”

Her keen sense of social justice has been literally my dream my entire life, so I’m just so proud to be on it.”



KELLEIGH RYAN FENCING

Event: Women’s Team Foil
Age: 34
Hometown: Ottawa
Residence: Calgary
Local Club: Ottawa Fencing
First Olympics
@smelleighk



FILE PHOTO

Kelleigh Ryan’s finally getting her Olympic opportunity

By Emma Kelly

“It’s been a completely different world for me,” Ottawa’s Kelleigh Ryan says, recounting training after the unprecedented delay of the Olympic Games.

In the days before the Olympics were pushed back a year, Ryan, who is a graduate of Glebe Collegiate and Carleton University, had to scramble. When she heard that the International Fencing Federation (FIE) was shutting down all events because of the virus responsible for causing COVID, she booked a flight to her home in New Jersey.

While living there with her husband, fencing coach Alex Martin, Ryan had intended to continue training nearby in New York City. But it was only a matter of time before the pandemic caused New York City to shut down.

She and Martin the flew to Ottawa. At first, they split their mandatory 14-day, self-isolation period in a house owned by Paul ApSimon, a Canadian team coach, businessman and Ottawa school teacher, and a house in the Glebe neighbourhood near Ryan’s parents. After their quarantine period, Ryan attempted to keep training for a short while before heading to Calgary, where facilities, again, would shut down shortly after her move.

At the time, Calgary didn’t give national team athletes exceptions, meaning Ryan was resigned to training in her house. Usually used to high performance training centres and regular practice on a strip, Ryan was stuck relying on smaller weights and sprints to keep in shape.

Despite the underwhelming circumstances, Ryan said she enjoyed time she had to focus on skills instead of bout technique.

The change in routine also helped Ryan realize just how important her mental performance was to her overall performance.

The Tokyo Games will be Ryan’s first Olympics, and the COVID crisis will prevent her husband from being able to experience it in person with her — much to Ryan’s disappointment.

“It is a little upsetting as we wanted to experience this together,” Ryan said.

Ryan and Martin have been together for 14 years, during which they’ve experienced a great number of competitions. Within that

time, Ryan’s won more than a dozen medals at Pan American Championships, two medals at the Pan American Games, and has competed almost every year at the FIE World Championships.

While Martin helps coach Ryan, he’s not one of Canada’s national team coaches, meaning he’s not allowed to attend the Games.

Though she won’t benefit from Martin’s presence at the Games, Ryan said that she is confident that the work they’ve put in together over the years will pay off at the Games.

Having experienced the Olympics before as a team supporter, Ryan’s still excited for her chance to compete, even despite the COVID measures that will make Tokyo’s Games more contained than they normally are.

“I remember the electricity I felt in the room when watching Eleanor (Harvey) compete in Rio 2016 and I am excited to experience this now as a player,” Ryan said.

Harvey, who Ryan will compete with in the women’s foil team event, defeated the world’s top-ranked fencer in her Olympic debut and placed 7th overall, which is the highest a Canadian fencer has ever placed at the Games.

Competition begins in the women’s foil team event on July 29.

Ryan, who is 34, wouldn’t say conclusively whether she’ll continue competing with the national team after these Olympics.

“I want to leave the door open for now,” she said. “Next year I would like to maybe attend a couple tournaments. I am not sure how I will feel after these Games, so I want to make [that] decision after Tokyo.”



AMBASSADORS FOR THE GAME: Gloucester Lady Griffins want girls in Ottawa to experience lacrosse



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@gloucesterladygriffins

/griffinsminorlacrosse

The Gloucester U17 Lady Griffins are a group of inspiring young leaders, and they are helping shine a light on the opportunities available in box lacrosse for girls of all ages in the Ottawa area.

Their efforts mirror the Ontario Lacrosse Association’s Ambassador Program, where the girls and women who play, ref and coach the game share their experiences in lacrosse to help bring others into the fold.

Many of the U17 Lady Griffins came to lacrosse seeking to work on crossover skills for their winter sports during the summer-time, but discovered a sport that gives them so much more.

“You just make so many good friendships,” underlines Leine Biro, who was first a ringette player. “When I come back to lacrosse season, it’s like you start right where you left off. It’s like coming home. Everyone needs to feel that.”

Team Coach Jarrett Chalmers has watched his players develop some great moves on the floor over the years, but has also seen a rise in their self-confidence, strength, toughness, teamwork and social interactions.

“With the game of lacrosse, there is a lot that translates to life in general,” he highlights. “You know, these girls are sisters. And they go to the wall for each other. I think they’re really learning the importance of family and friendship.”

Jarrett’s daughter Chloe Chalmers is “a pretty introverted person” who was “not a very social person, but with lacrosse, I feel like everyone’s my friend,” she indicates. “Everyone’s so nice and we all get along. It’s a really great atmosphere.”



The U17 Lady Griffins are also great examples of what’s possible. Their program started from scratch around 6 years ago, they lost all but one game in their first season, and now they’re winning provincial tournaments.

Competitive play is just one avenue – there are also opportunities in house league and introductory lacrosse programming.

Many of the U17 Lady Griffins are now helping out with those grassroots programs, eager to give back and show newcomers the ropes.

“I love teaching young players,” signals Annika Lafreniere, also an Ottawa Lady 67’s hockey player in winter. “Lacrosse is such a fun sport, and I would love to see more girls playing.”

Before COVID hit, the Gloucester Lacrosse Association held girls’ sessions one after the other, starting from the youngest age group up to the oldest.

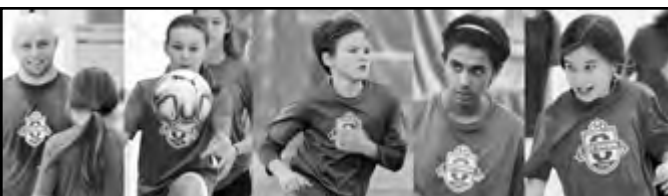
“It is nice to see the groups bump up against the next group coming in,” reflects GLA President Stephanie Pagan. “You get a real feeling of cohesion, and you know there’s a connection to the next level. In this way, the younger girls are given an opportunity to look up to the next group of older girls and see the opportunities that lay before them.”

GLA Girls Program Director Colette Caines says it was especially powerful to see members of the U17 team helping the new players and demonstrating different skills.

“It was such a great environment, and helped us create some great momentum that we want to get back now,” Caines adds. “The girls on this team really are exceptional ambassadors for the GLA.”

The Gloucester Lacrosse Association (GLA) is offering programming throughout the summer so that anybody new to the sport can come and play lacrosse. Visit gloucester-lacrosse.com for more information.

gloucester-lacrosse.com



Ottawa TFC Telegram

Coach profile: Czech UEFA A coach Michal Krtek



In his new role with Ottawa TFC Soccer Club, Michal Krtek has begun sharing lots of his knowledge from European soccer with young local players, and they've been helping him out too to work on his English.

A nice attraction for Krtek to move to Ottawa's east end from the Czech Republic was indeed the opportunity to improve his English (and maybe learn a little French too).

"I was tired of needing people to translate for me when coaching at tournaments in Europe," smiles Krtek. "Now I have 20 players – always one or five players understand what I mean and help me with explaining to other players."

Krtek has been in Ottawa for half a year now, and is coaching with Ottawa TFC's Ontario Player Development League teams. He's not the first Czech staff member at the organization; Vlad Vrsecky, the boys academy director, and Krtek played U13 on the same team, and a mutual friend introduced the two of them to Pavel Cancura, the club's general manager. His two compatriots have been a big help at adjusting to the move, underlines the 33-year-old from Dačice.

Krtek competed for FC Taborsko – a team in the second-tier Czech professional league – during his playing days, until he retired at age 28 following three knee surgeries.

Krtek has since become a UEFA 'A'-licensed coach (which is the highest level of certification available in the amateur ranks). His interest in coaching isn't new though. He's been a youth coach for the past eight years and has also worked for the Czech Football Association.

Since coming to Ottawa, Krtek has noticed a lot of differences between Czech and Canadian culture in general, and specifically around soccer. For one, Ottawa is a much bigger city than his hometown, which has a population just above 7,000.

"In my city, I knew all people," he signals. "There is different price for food, for travelling," he adds.

In Europe, people perceive Canada as mainly a hockey country, Krtek notes, but he's now experienced the burgeoning passion Canadian kids have for soccer (the 3,000+ players at Ottawa TFC serving as a prime example).

He also found it interesting that there were separate boys' and girls' teams, while in the Czech Republic they all play together. Coaches also usually only were in charge of one team, but here he gets to work with a wide variety of teams at different age levels.

His coaching style also contrasts with what many Canadian kids anticipate.

"I am calm. I say before games what I want, and during the game I support players, but not much," he explains. "(Canadian) coaches, all 90 minutes, speak, comment on the game. I have to do this because the players were surprised I am quiet."

Part of Krtek's love for coaching youth soccer comes from the chance he gets to get to know each player individually.

"I can learn about the kids, not only about soccer, learn about them as people," underlines Krtek, who's fit in seamlessly with the club culture for which Ottawa TFC is renowned.

Krtek was surprised about how hardworking players are during practices. It's not that Czech kids don't work hard, he indicates, but they have different preferences.

"When I say okay, two times sprint 50 metres, the (Ottawa TFC) players go," he highlighted, while Czech players would question that kind of thing more, and prefer to actually play.

The language barrier is less of a struggle with the kids as well.

"With kids, it's more easy than now when I do interviews," he laughs. "On the field, it's more easy because I can show what I want, and the kids help me. I am learning more English, but soccer is a language too."

OttawaTFC.com



MIKE TAYLER CANOE SLALOM

**Event: Men's K-1
Age: 29
Hometown: Ottawa
Local Club: Ottawa
River Runners
Third Olympics
@michaeltayler**

6 months training in France was time well spent for slalom kayaker

By Martin Cleary

Imagine spending six months in France, adding a whole new essence to winter and spring. Ah, the cafes, the shops, the ambiance. Life would be grand. Pass another croissant, please. Merci.

But slalom kayaker Michael Tayler, who along with four canoe/kayak slalom teammates spent the first half of 2021 in France, never found the cafes, the shops or experienced the French culture. He was all business in his bubble existence.

But living in Pau, in the southwest of France for the first two months, and then Paris until July when he departed for Tokyo and his third and final Summer Olympic Games, was wonderful in so many other ways.

"The training was great, but we didn't see the sites," Tayler said in a phone interview. "We were happy to get training and home-cooked dinners. It was a different setting, but like at home. It wasn't your typical European vacation."

When in Pau, Tayler trained at the Pau-Pyrenees Whitewater Stadium, the home base for the French team. When in Paris, he practised on the new whitewater slalom site for the 2024 Summer Olympics. It's similar to the Tokyo course.

Canoe Kayak Canada slalom officials considered several trips to and from Europe for training and meets, but the COVID-19 pandemic made that impossible. The best solution was to locate in France for consistent pre-Olympic training.

The travel, quarantine accommodation and training costs were covered by Canoe Kayak Canada, a special Sports Canada COVID-19 fund, and the athletes.

"It was something we had to do," said Tayler, who trained on Ottawa's Pumphouse course during the shutdown 2020 season. "It's what was most cost effective."

"It has been a great experience with quality training," added Tayler, who missed qualifying for the semifinal round at the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics by 18/100s of a second. "I was almost eight months (2020) in Ottawa with no competition."

"That was the longest time I had spent at home. Now, this is the long-



PHOTO: BALINT VEKASSY / CKC

est time I have been away from home. I have only had to deal with a few nagging injuries. But you need consistency of training in a technical sport.

"You can spend time in a gym and that's beneficial. But there's no replacement for the real thing."

Besides all of his consistent training on world-class courses in France, Tayler was able to compete on Tokyo's Kasai Canoe Slalom Course during the test event in October 2019. Over two weekends, he had two top-15 results.

"I'm lucky. It was a long time ago, but I'm familiar with the course. I was able to experience the Tokyo course and that helps a lot. They've made a few changes to the course. It's quicker in places," continued the Nepean High School and Carleton University grad.

"You must be precise. Things can change quickly. I like it. I spent so much time over 2020 at the Pumphouse. It's not at Olympic standard, but it's similar with the gate distance and gate closeness. It fits my style of paddling."

Precise is a good word to describe slalom kayaking. At the 2016 Rio Olympics, Tayler made some mistakes in his first run, but delivered a quality run on his second leg, which left him a split second and one place shy of the semifinals.

"It was tough to be so close and not get into the semifinals. Eighteen one-hundredths of a second is a tiny margin. If I did a few paddle strokes different... But that's the nature of the sport," he recalled.

His first Olympic Games in 2012 was an overwhelming experience. At the age of 20, Tayler won the Canadian trials against an experienced field. And he was the only Canadian white-

water slalom paddler to qualify for the London Games.

"I was so young, shocked to qualify for the team," said the Ottawa River Runners product. "Being on my own as the only Canadian in slalom, it was a different experience with my coach. It was a great time, but a different dynamic. We'll have a full team in Tokyo."

Despite all of what has happened in the past 16 pandemic months in the world, Tayler feels ready to perform at his third and final Olympics.

"Absolutely. The date (Aug. 28) has been on my mind for the last six months. We're almost there. The men's kayak (K1) is so tight and competitive. You'll need a good performance in the qualifying (round) to make it through (to semis).

"It's different than a World Cup or World Championships. It's the best. It's extremely competitive and all about performance. I have that experience. I'll be relaxed and treat it like any other race. That's what it is."

"I can feel that improvement (since 2016 Rio). That top-10 (result) is within reach. Consistency is so important. Over the last four years, my consistency of runs has improved my ability to deliver."

At the Canadian Olympic trials in 2019, Tayler was behind after the first race in the best-of-three series. But he rebounded and delivered wins in the final two races to earn the nomination to the Olympic team.

An RBC Olympian the past four years earning valuable off-season job experience, Tayler is about to end his Games' career.

"It has been a great experience, but I look forward to what's next. The (slalom) time commitment was crazy."



CAM SMEDLEY CANOE SLALOM

**Event: Men's C-1
Age: 30
Hometown: Dunrobin
Local Club: Ottawa River Runners
Second Olympics
@smedleycanoe**

Cameron Smedley is a natural on the water

By Madalyn Howitt

Coming from a family of dedicated paddling enthusiasts, it's almost as if Cameron Smedley was destined to one day make it to the Olympics.

Now competing for Canada on the men's canoe-kayak slalom team, Smedley's interest in slalom canoeing was fostered through an age-old Canadian tradition: the summer canoeing trip.

Growing up, the Ottawa-born athlete would spend vacations on paddling trips with his family, exploring rivers around Canada and going on outdoor adventures. Along with his brother Liam and sister Alison — also talented canoers in their own right — Smedley's love of being on the water eventually brought him and his siblings to the Ottawa River Runners (ORR), an organization dedicated to whitewater paddling.

It was there that all those family canoe trips paid off for Smedley, as his talent on the whitewater slalom course became obvious to his coaches and mentors.

Michael Staniszewski is a coach for Team Canada's canoe-kayak slalom team and is himself a former Olympian, winning a silver medal for Poland in the canoe slalom C-2 event at the Sydney 2000 Games. He met Smedley at the ORR nearly 20 years ago, and said he recruited the young paddler to compete in canoe-slalom over kayak-slalom after seeing his natural talent in the larger boat.

"It's a huge difference between canoeing and kayaking," Staniszewski ex-



PHOTO: STEVE KINGSMAN

plained. "Because you have one single blade [in canoeing], one paddle on one side, it's already a big challenge just steering the boat. If you then transition it to whitewater paddling, it's very difficult. A lot of people get discouraged."

That wasn't the case for Smedley, however.

"He was born to canoe," said Staniszewski. "He has all the skills to pilot a kayak very well, but I thought it would be better for him to be a canoeer, given the background of all those canoe trips."

Smedley's decision to focus on canoeing eventually paid off. As a young competitor, Smedley made Canadian history when he became the first men's C-1 paddler to finish in the top 10 at the ICF World Junior Championships in 2007. Years later he won C-1 silver at the 2015 Pan Am Games in Toronto and made his Olympic debut the following year at Rio 2016, where he finished 15th. At the Tokyo 2020 test event he finished in an impressive 5th place, lay-

ing the foundation for a strong showing at this year's Games.

Staniszewski said he's confident Smedley will perform well this summer. "This is his second Olympics, so he knows exactly what to do and what to expect," Staniszewski said. "He knows what's good and what's bad [to do] in preparation for these games. He makes very smart decisions."

One of those decisions is avoiding things that could hinder his focus as he prepares for his events.

"When I competed, it was very hard to stay on the path when there were so many distractions," said Staniszewski. "Cameron is trying to not be distracted by little things, starting from media to food, to anything that is uncomfortable. He's totally aware that he can't control a lot of things, so he doesn't try to."

"He knows how to race, what pace to pick. He manages his expectations and just tries to do what he is capable of. He just needs to be himself at the starting block."



TIM NEDOW ATHLETICS

**Event: Men's Shot Put
Age: 30
Hometown: Brockville
Residence: Ottawa
Local Club: Ottawa Lions
Second Olympics**

Tim Nedow taking second Olympic shot

By Kieran Heffernan

Less than a year ago, shot putter Tim Nedow wasn't even sure if he'd keep up his push to make Canada's Olympic team.

The Ottawa Lions athlete told the *Sports Pages* last August that not continuing competing was "still

a thought," but added that "things are just going so well."

Now, the 2015 Pan Am silver medalist will in fact be competing with Team Canada, for what will be his second Olympics. In Rio, he placed 16th. Since then, he's had some even higher finishes including 4th at the 2019 Pan Am Games and 9th at the 2019 World Athletics Championships in Doha, Qatar.

Despite the strong showing at the world championships, Nedow suffered a financial blow to his competing hopes thanks to the federal government's complicated Athlete Assistance Program.

Still, Nedow found ways to continue training throughout the pandemic. At first, he was lifting weights at home in his basement and throwing in parking lots, before training

at Terry Fox Athletic Facility and the Louis-Riel Dome. Finally, he was able to move to Pennsylvania, where he's based at Garage Strength, a gym that boasts of training 43 Team USA athletes and seven Olympians.

During Nedow's first outdoor competition of the season in April, his 21.11m throw automatically qualified him for Tokyo (the Olympic standard is 21 metres).



The Ottawa Lions Roar

Ottawa Lions' streak of Olympics and Paralympics participation persists

The tradition continues. Several Ottawa Lions Track and Field Club athletes will again be wearing Team Canada singlets at this summer's Olympic and Paralympic Games, keeping alive a longstanding streak.

The latest crew of Lions Olympians are **Melissa Bishop-Nriagu** (women's 800 metres), **Tim Nedow** (men's shot put) and **Lauren Gale** (women's 4x400 m relay).

This will be the third Olympics for 32-year-old Bishop-Nriagu, who placed 28th at London 2012 and came within one spot of the podium with a 4th at Rio 2016.

It will be Olympics #2 for 30-year-old Nedow, who was 16th in Rio and later placed 9th at the 2019 World Championships in the strongest competition in the history of the event.

It will be the Olympic debut for 21-year-old Gale, who is the youngest member of the Canadian track and field team.

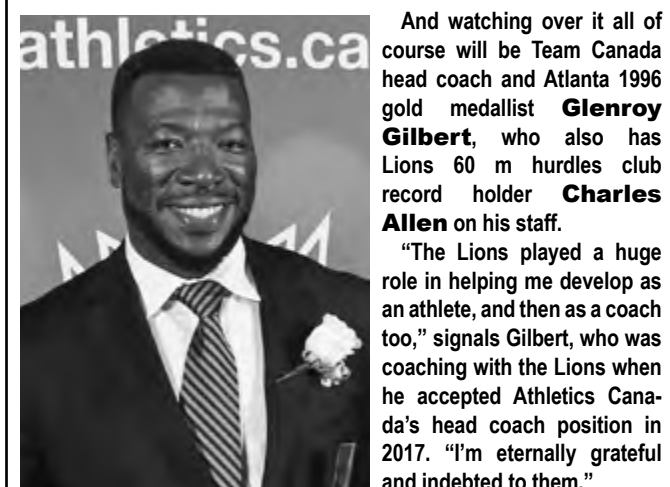
"I am unbelievably excited," Gale says. "It is so awesome to get to represent Canada on the biggest stage and run against my idols."

Gale will team up with another Lions product in the women's 4x400 m relay in **Alicia Brown**, who grew up in Ottawa before moving to Toronto for university.

The Canadian Olympic team also includes another Lions alum, **Mike Woods**, who was a Pan American junior champion in the 1,500 m before ultimately becoming Canada's top road cyclist.

Come the start of the Paralympics in late August, the local Tokyo Games athletics contingent should swell further still, with half-a-dozen Lions in contention for Team Canada selection.

TEAM CANADA COACH GLENROY GILBERT KICKSTARTED LIONS' 9-GAMES OLYMPIC RUN



And watching over it all of course will be Team Canada head coach and Atlanta 1996 gold medalist **Glenroy Gilbert**, who also has Lions 60 m hurdles club record holder **Charles Allen** on his staff.

"The Lions played a huge role in helping me develop as an athlete, and then as a coach too," signals Gilbert, who was coaching with the Lions when he accepted Athletics Canada's head coach position in 2017. "I'm eternally grateful and indebted to them."

Gilbert's Olympic debut as a long jumper at Seoul 1988 marked the start of the Lions' streak of having representatives at every Olympics since then – it will be nine and counting once athletics kicks off on July 30 (July 29 in Ottawa).

The Lions own a similar record of Paralympic appearances, with eight in a row since 1992.

"Throughout the years, they've always been there," notes Gilbert, a 1994 Winter Olympic bobsledder. "They've always been a strong club, and a big club with lots of members and lots of coaches, and they always put athletes on Canadian teams from the development stage all the way up to the national team."

"It's been that way since I was there, so it's obviously very positive to see that continue."

OttawaLions.com



Event:
Women's 4x400 m Relay
Age: 31
Hometown: Ottawa
Residence: Toronto
Local Club: Ottawa Lions
Second Olympics

Alicia Brown

ATHLETICS





@lici_b

See local Olympians' competition schedules at:
ottawasportspages.ca/events

Alicia Brown intends to make the wait for the Olympics well worth it

By Kieran Heffernan

Alicia Brown has always had to balance her training with the rest of her life.

The former Ottawa Lions runner had always been an athlete while at the same time holding a full-time job, but the past year and a half has added injuries, mental health struggles, and scheduling complications into the mix. Not to mention the fact she was planning on retiring after the 2020 Olympics.

A middle-distance runner, Brown will be competing at the Tokyo Games in the 4x400m relay. She's focused on keeping her mind set on what she initially set out to do at the Games, even if it took an extra year of waiting to get there.

"At the end of the day, I still have a goal," Brown said. "Whenever I stand on the start line or whenever I'm competing and training, I think about all those around me that have supported me, as well as those that can't do the things that I do for various different reasons."

For her, possibly missing the Games because of their postponement wasn't really an option.

"I wouldn't have felt quite right if I had chosen to retire ... and the goal for the last five years now was to fight for a second Olympics, and so I knew that I needed to give myself the opportunity to at least try," Brown said.

Brown competed in the 400m and the 4x400m events at the Rio Olympics, placing



FILE PHOTO

4th place with the relay team.

She said the biggest challenge she has faced since March 2020 was the lack of training facilities. Since 2008, she had been training out of the University of Toronto, but those facilities haven't opened since the start of the pandemic. It wasn't until late last fall that she was able to start training at York University's Toronto Track and Field Centre,

where she needed a high performance sport exemption from the City of Toronto. However, she still doesn't have the structure that she's used to with her training schedule.

"What allowed me to balance working and training in the past was that I knew exactly what time I was training and where I was training, and I was able to schedule the rest of my life around training," she said. Now, things are much more unpredictable.

"Every week, (my) coach would submit training times to the Toronto Track and Field Centre, so he would ask for let's say Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at 9am. But all the other athletes that were permitted to use the facility would do the same thing. And so, the Toronto Track and Field Centre would take a look at all the schedules and they would essentially assign training times to different training groups. And that changed on a weekly basis."

She's grateful for the flexibility that's been offered to her at her job doing communications and marketing for U of T's Hart House fitness centre. She sometimes works extra early or late in order to make time for training during the day.

Injuries are something else Brown has been struggling with since the indoor season, in particular with her tendons.

"My Achilles tendinitis flared up really really bad, and Achilles injuries are really painful. They can be very very finicky to heal, and I genuinely was not sure if I would be able to finish the season," she said. A number of other athletes on the national team are experiencing similar injuries, Brown said, and their physical therapists were starting to notice.



Event:
Women's 4x400 m Relay
Age: 21
Hometown: Ottawa
Residence: Fort Collins, Colorado
Local Club: Ottawa Lions
First Olympics

Lauren Gale

ATHLETICS





@lauren_gale_track

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Heading to her first Olympics, Lauren Gale is off to a running start

By Madalyn Howitt

Sprinter Lauren Gale was sitting on her porch when she first heard the news that she'd be making her Olympic debut for Team Canada. Only, it wasn't through a phone call or email that she found out — it was through a Tweet.

"The Ottawa Lions had tweeted congrats for making the team, and I was like oh my gosh. Technically they broke the news to me," she recently said with a laugh, when speaking to the Sports Pages.

The social media shout-out from Gale's hometown club informed her that she'd be competing for Canada in the 4x400m re-

lay. At 21-years-old, Gale has also achieved the distinction of being the youngest member of Canada's track and field squad. It's a remarkable accomplishment, especially since she'll be competing in an event that is somewhat notorious for being a gruelling race. Yet given her obvious natural talent and her determined spirit, it's a feat that her coaches and mentors are not at all surprised to see her achieve.

"She ran the type of time as a 16-year-old that very, very few 16-years-olds can run," said John Riese, Gale's coach at Colorado State University where the sprinter is studying to be a dental hygienist. He said her impressive finish times as a teenager indicated she was quickly on the path to Olympic-level racing, which was brought to fruition after she ran the 400m this year in 51.96 seconds, enough to qualify her for a



PHOTO: DAN PLOUFFE

spot with Team Canada.

"See a 51 up on the board was absolutely insane — I was in shock when it happened," said Gale. "Seeing faster times and [realizing] that my training is working and everything's paying off — it was great."

Born in Fredericton, N.B. and raised in Ottawa, Gale's father was in the military, which meant moving every few years and starting anew.

"It's been challenging to go into a new program every couple of years and meet new people, but I definitely think it just helped me adapt to different cultures and get to share different experiences with people," said Gale, adding that her ability to adapt quickly to new environments will be helpful as she takes on the Olympics for the first time.

GALE continues on next page

"We think part of the reason of (the increase in tendon injuries) is because athletes didn't have access to weight training facilities, and they weren't carrying the same load on a daily basis," she said.

In addition to her physical health, Brown also began to struggle more with her mental health while training during the pandemic.

"I've had probably smaller bouts but very manageable bouts. But what I experienced over the last year and a half was to a point where I recognized that I needed more support," she said. "There were plenty of days where I really struggled. I struggled to put my shoes on, to go outside and train." On those days, sometimes she would instead practice yoga or meditation, a habit she picked up during the pandemic. Learning to listen to and respect her body was an important lesson these past few months.

"Athlete culture is very much go, go, go, and push, push, push, and grind, and that's not always healthy, and so this year I learned to take a step back when I needed to."

After the Olympics, Brown also plans to put that lesson to use.

"What I would like to do differently this year, as opposed to what I did following the Rio Olympics, is just carve out a little bit more time and space for myself," the 31-year-old said. "My priority post-Olympics is just to take some time away from work, and just recover." She hopes she'll have an opportunity to give back to sport in the future, but isn't sure in what capacity. One possibility could be as a personal trainer, which she's been certified to do for the past eight years and would allow her to remain closely involved in athletics.



Event: Women's 800 m
Age: 32
Hometown: Eganville
Residence: Windsor
Local Club: Ottawa Lions
Third Olympics

Melissa Bishop-Nriagu

ATHLETICS





@melissacorinneb

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Bishop-Nriagu is fast and fit approaching her third Summer Olympics

By Martin Cleary

In case you missed it, Sunday, May 9, was Mother's Day.

While that would be solid a reason as any for Melissa Bishop-Nriagu of Eganville, Ont. to be happy, she had even better grounds for joy.

Seven days after achieving the Athletics Canada Olympic standard of 1:59.50 for the delayed 2021 Tokyo Summer Olympics with a run of 1:59.40 at a twilight meet in Chula Vista, California, she was chasing another goal.

"I woke up (Sunday, May 2) thinking it was going to happen (making the time standard)," Bishop-Nriagu told CBC. "It was a great opportunity with a great (pacesetter, American Nikki Hiltz).

"I have a lot of confidence in the training that (coach) Trent (Stellingwerff) and I have been doing. I had nothing to lose. I was allowed to put everything on the line with no expectation of placing in any position."

That outcome became a perfect backdrop for her on May 9 at the Golden Games in Walnut, California. The competition would be tougher, which could drive a faster time, on her third and final West Coast mini-tour meet.

In the women's A 800-metre race, Bishop-Nriagu had a tight battle with a pair of Great Britain runners – Jemma Reekie, 1:58.27, and Laura Muir, 1:58.46 – who were first and second, while she took third at 1:58.62.

Lauren Gale: 'I think starting at the Olympics super young can mean more opportunities,' 21-year-old says

GALE continued from last page

"I'm super excited [to be on the team] because I think starting at the Olympics super young can mean more opportunities to go again at a more mature age. Hopefully I can follow some other athletes [and] get more into the rhythm of big competitions like this," she said, referring to her Team Canada teammate and fellow Ottawa Lions alumna Alicia Brown as one person who's an inspiration to her.

Likewise, Riese doesn't expect that Gale's young age and rookie status will hinder her on the track. "She's been training



PHOTO: STEVE KINGSMAN

But finishing third, thanks in part to race rabbit Rebecca Mehara of the United States, felt more like a weight-off-the-shoulders victory for Bishop-Nriagu, who was back racing seriously for her first season since 2017.

Bishop-Nriagu ran a season-best 1:58.62 on the Hilmer Lodge Stadium track, which filled her with joy and confidence to continue her preparations for a third Summer Olympic Games.

"Especially after that 1:58, the smile on her face told me everything," Stellingwerff said in a telephone interview. "She took the lead on the backstretch and ran with poise with two of the best women."

"She didn't win it, but she was right on their heels. She had a huge smile because she knew she was back racing with the best in the world. The talent doesn't go away. It just needs to be polished."

Stellingwerff agreed to coach Bishop-Nriagu in 2017, after her long-time Windsor coach Dennis Fairall stepped down because of progressive supranuclear palsy, a rare degenerative brain disease. He died Nov. 6, 2020 at 67.

After the 2015 world championship silver medalist placed fifth at the 2017 worlds, Bishop-Nriagu stepped off the track to marry Osi Nriagu in October and have their first child, Corinne, in July 2018.

Bishop-Nriagu was keen to

like 20 minutes afterwards, definitely not like the 100-meter sprint."

However, she credits the exhausting nature of the event with pushing her to develop her endurance on the track.

"It has made me a stronger athlete for sure, mentally and physically. It's so hard to race but it's definitely worth it," she said.

Riese added that even though it's a tough event, the athletes he coaches often prefer the 4x400m relay over just the 400m sprint.

"In the 400m they hurt a lot more than say the 200m or 200m hurdles, but the nice thing with the 4x400 is when you get

qualify for the Canadian team to the 2019 world championships, but in four 800-metre races she couldn't break 2:01. Her first pregnancy and returning to training brought about injuries.

"Corinne was an absolute blessing for Melissa as it made her more balanced and stable," said Stellingwerff, a sport scientist with Athletics Canada who is researching elite female runners returning from pregnancy.

He explained that women have lower bone mineral density after delivering and certain hormones are released. The runner can also be sleep deprived and fatigued, which can affect training along with breastfeeding.

In her short, unproductive 2019 season, Bishop-Nriagu suffered a pelvic stress fracture. And then came the shutdown COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, but that might have been a good thing as it allowed her to rehab and recover.

"There's a drastic increase for the risk of stress fractures and tendon pulls (after pregnancy)," he added. "I've seen it over and over and as long as women are patient, we've seen (many) come back faster and stronger."

Bishop-Nriagu is a good case in point. After a rare blazing start to her season in early May, the Ottawa Lions Track and Field Club athlete pulled back a tad over her next four races, including matching the Olympic standard of 1:59:50 at the Canadian trials.

In her final race before heading to a training camp in Gifu, Japan, Bishop-Nriagu boosted her confidence even more by winning the Sunset Tour 800 metres in Sacramento, California, in a season-best 1:58.36.

"She's as strong, as fit and as fast as she has been in her entire career," said Stellingwerff, who knows she'll have to run faster and may have to break her four-year-old national record of 1:57.01 to find true success.

The top six women have run 1:56, including leader Athing Mu, an American 19-year-old who won the United States trials in 1:56.07. There are another seven runners at 1:57 before you find Bishop-Nriagu ranked at 16th.

The top runners will have three races – heats, semifinals and final – over five days.

"It's not necessarily the fastest woman who will win the race, but who will be the fastest after multiple races," Stellingwerff added.

the baton in your hand, you're running for other people. You can convince a lot more people to run the 4x400 than you can just the 400-metre sprint," laughed Riese.

Gale said she also prefers the relay for the sense of community. "I want to run better because I have more people relying on me."

As for what she's most looking forward to at the Games, the cheerful Gale said it's the chance to be among the best. "The experience of getting to see the best athletes, getting to compete and seeing the Olympics in person — I'm just really flippin' excited!"



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GLENROY GILBERT ATHLETICS COACH

25 years since his famous relay in Atlanta, Glenroy Gilbert recalls the sprint as life changing

By Kieran Heffernan

Glenroy Gilbert was not always a sprinter. He was not even always a track and field athlete. In fact, as a child, he was a soccer player. "One year I made a (soccer) team. It was a regional team to go off and play somewhere, and they canceled it last minute for reasons I don't even remember," said Gilbert, who is partly responsible for one of Canada's greatest Olympic moments.

"It's been that long; but from there I was so disappointed with it, I just stopped playing soccer," explained the 1996 Summer Games medalist.

This August marks 25 years since Gilbert, who was raised in Ottawa, Donovan Bailey, Robert Esmie and Bruny Surin famously defeated the Americans in the 4x100m relay at the Atlanta Olympics.

While reflecting on his career more recently, Gilbert gives credit to his Grade 8 teacher at Pinecrest Public School, Glenn Munro, for encouraging him to try track and field and eventually join the Ottawa Lions. There, he started out as a long and triple jumper.

"I was told by one of the coaches — and they were absolutely right — I just wasn't fast enough," Gilbert said. "I was fast on the soccer field, but I wasn't track-and-field fast."

It wasn't until he got hurt during college, while attending Louisiana State University, that Gilbert switched to the 100m and 200m events.

The victory in Atlanta over an American team that had a home-turf advantage, were historically dominant in sprinting, and were backed by a narrative pushed state-side that touted them as guaranteed champions changed Gilbert's life in countless ways.

"The biggest one for me is being in the position I'm in now: to be able to contribute years



FILE PHOTO

of knowledge, not just as an athlete but now as a coach to a lot of the young up-and-coming athletes and coaches in our sport," said Gilbert, who is the head coach of Canada's track and field team.

However, even if he had not won that gold medal, Gilbert said he likely would have eventually turned to coaching.

"I used to always kind of study, go a little deeper as an athlete because I needed to find the nuances, the things that are going to make you better than the next guy," he explained.

This attitude made coaching seem like a natural choice, and Gilbert was already coaching some younger athletes before he retired, but the win in Atlanta opened doors to learning from some of the best. He was an apprentice coach for Athletics Canada to both Molly Killingbeck, the long-time national team coach who held the position in 1996, and former Athletics Canada head coach Alex Gardiner.

Around the same time, Gilbert also started volunteer coaching for the Ottawa Lions, mostly with older athletes.

"It gives you an opportunity to apply what it is you think you know to athletes who everyone else has worked with," he said.

GILBERT continues on page 15

JOANNA BROWN TRIATHLON

Age: 28
Local Club: Bytown Storm
First Olympics: Hometown: Carp
Events: Women's Race & Mixed Relay

Travelling triathlete Joanna Brown ready for first Summer Olympics

By Martin Cleary

Joanna Brown is in constant motion. One of Canada's top triathletes, it's a given as she swims, cycles and runs. But to participate in her 86 career international races, she has had to travel to 17 nations.

Cross-crossing around the world, scrambling through airports and, don't forget, continuous training over the past 13 years also has put a lot of miles on this elite Carp, ON., athlete, as well as many miles on an air travel card.

But her last two trips, which are memorable for totally opposite reasons, and the latest trip that will take her to her first Summer Olympic Games later this month in Tokyo, will all rank high on her list of athletic journeys.

On the heels of a successful 2019 World Triathlon Series season including a bronze medal in Bermuda, a fifth at the world mixed relay championships and racing on the Tokyo triathlon Olympic course, the COVID-19 pandemic landed with a thud.

Brown was living in the United Kingdom, when everything started to tighten up and Canada told its citizens to come home. The Olympics were postponed. Triathlon competitions were cancelled. Brown retreated to rejoin her family in Carp.

She spent two months in the rural community on the western edge of Ottawa "watching the world react and how things were unfolding," recounts the 28-year-old. But when Brown had had enough of being locked down, she decided to escape.

Brown flew to Seattle and met an American triathlete friend. They decided to become vagabonds and see the world from a completely different perspective.

"We wanted to get away from the world," Brown said in a telephone interview. "It was hard with all the competitions being cancelled and the Olympics being postponed."



PHOTO: STEVE KINGSMAN

Brown and her friend lived in an RV van and travelled the West Coast of the United States. They had an awesome time with "no electricity, no water, out in nature and away from noise," according to Brown.

"It was definitely the experience of a lifetime," she added. "We were unplugged out in the forest with no worries or schedules. The world was falling apart, but it was nice to get away. It was refreshing."

In the spring of 2021, Brown started to rebuild her life as a triathlete and travel again. Competing for the first time in almost 21 months on May 13, she placed 13th in the World Triathlon Championship Series race in Yokohama, Japan.

BROWN continues on page 15

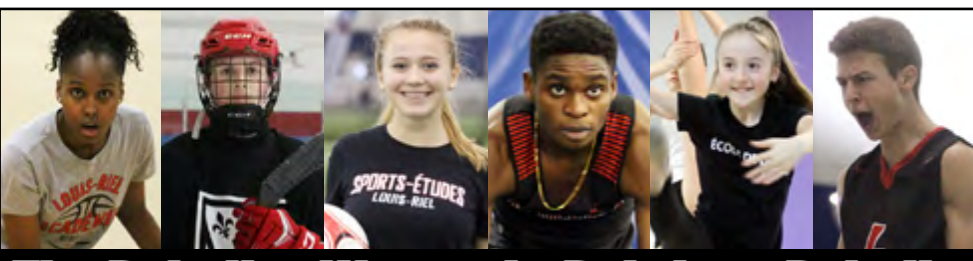
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The Rebelles Wrap • La Rubrique Rebelle

LR grad overcomes injury/pandemic to earn OUA basketball spot



Maryse Miaro's senior year at Louis-Riel high school started off on the wrong foot – literally – but now, her future in sports and academics is looking brighter than ever.

The recently-graduated Rebelle is now set to join the Ontario Tech University Ridgebacks this fall, but a year ago, Miaro's basketball dreams didn't look as promising. In September, the 17-year-old guard tore her Achilles tendon during a practice.

"Not being able to play for a long period of time was a strange experience," highlights Miaro, who was used to training most days of the week before the pandemic as part of the Louis-Riel Girls' Basketball Academy.

To make the best out of an unfortunate situation, the Rebelles held virtual workouts to keep up their normal training volume, practicing skills like dribbling and shooting in their basements and garages. Miaro says help from her coach André Desjardins and her parents kept her motivated to keep playing the sport that she loves.

"I would play basketball hopping on one leg. I had that mentality of still being an athlete, even though I wasn't able to participate as much," she notes. "I felt like I had more time to work on my individual skills. And I think it helped me develop self-discipline."

Une diplômée 2021 de Louis-Riel, Maryse Miaro a surmonté une blessure grave et la pandémie pour jouer au basket universitaire

La dernière année de Maryse Miaro à l'École secondaire publique Louis-Riel s'est débütée du mauvais pied – littéralement – mais maintenant, son avenir sportif et académique semble être très radieux.

La joueuse de basketball Rebelle vient de recevoir son diplôme secondaire et se joindra à l'alignement des Ridgebacks de l'Université Ontario Tech cet automne. En septembre 2020, lorsque Maryse a déchiré son tendon d'Achille, ses rêves sportives ne paraissaient pas être aussi prometteurs.

« C'était une expérience assez étrange de ne pas être capable de jouer pour une période prolongée », indique Maryse, qui s'entraînait d'habitude presque chaque journée de la semaine au sein de l'Académie de basketball féminine de Louis-Riel.

Pour s'adapter à la pandémie, les Rebelles ont fait des entraînements en ligne pour maintenir leur volume régulier, en utilisant leurs sous-sols ou garages pour pratiquer leurs habiletés de dribble et tir.

Maryse explique que ses parents et son entraîneur André Desjardins l'ont aidé à garder sa motivation.

« J'ai joué au basket en sautant sur un pied. J'ai pu garder la mentalité d'être athlète, même

In overcoming the challenges of both a serious injury and a pandemic, Desjardins says Miaro has gained the resilience needed to excel in varsity sports.

"She really came into her own in the last year and a half," signals the past Team Ontario and Team Canada coach. "I think she's going to be someone who's going to bring a lot of energy to a group – good physically, really great teammate."

Miaro credits the Louis-Riel Sports-Study program with preparing her to take on the challenges of the past year.

"The teachers really do care so much about you succeeding in your sport," underlines Miaro, who will rejoin past Rebelles teammate Bilan Khadar, a 2019 grad, at Ontario Tech.

"They're really involved in your success and willing to go the extra step for you. It wasn't a 'me, myself and I' thing to succeed – the school as a whole wants to see you succeed," she adds. "I think that really sets it apart."

Desjardins feels "super proud of her, and the undergraduate girls, and how they did this year. I'm excited to see what the next chapter is," he adds.

The next chapter for Miaro will be on the court in Oshawa. Along with living on campus in the fall, she says she's most excited for the opportunity to play against university athletes.

"Being able to play at a higher level against these women that have been training their whole lives to be where they are now - I'm so ready to play."

Une diplômée 2021 de Louis-Riel, Maryse Miaro a surmonté une blessure grave et la pandémie pour jouer au basket universitaire



Maryse Miaro jouera avec Ontario Tech dès cet automne.

si je n'étais pas capable de participer autant », note Maryse. « J'avais plus de temps pour la pratique de mes habiletés individuelles. Et je crois que tout cela m'a aidé à développer l'autodiscipline. »

En surmontant les défis de sa blessure et la pandémie, M. Desjardins croit que Maryse a acquis la ténacité requise pour exceller dans le sport universitaire.

« Elle s'est vraiment bien développée au cours de la dernière année et demie », dit l'ancien entraîneur des Équipes Ontario et Canada. « Je crois qu'elle sera une joueuse qui ajoutera beaucoup d'énergie au groupe – bonne physique, et une très bonne coéquipière. »

Le programme Sports-Études de Louis-Riel a beaucoup aidé pour se préparer à affronter la dernière année, signale Maryse.

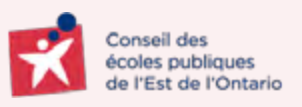
« Selon moi, ce qui distingue Louis-Riel, c'est le soutien des enseignants, qui sont vraiment investis dans notre réussite dans le sport », ajoute Maryse, qui rejoindra son ancienne coéquipière des Rebelles, Bilan Khadar, une diplômée de 2019, à Ontario Tech.

« Ce n'était pas moi seule qui voulait réussir – c'était tout le monde à l'école. »

M. Desjardins se sent « super fier de Maryse, et les filles plus jeunes, et comment elles se sont comportées cette année. J'ai hâte de voir quel sera le prochain chapitre. »

Pour Maryse, ça se déroulera sur le terrain à Oshawa. En plus de rester sur le campus lorsque l'automne arrive, elle a très hâte d'avoir la chance de se tester face à des athlètes universitaires.

« Pouvoir jouer à un plus haut niveau contre ses femmes qui se sont entraînées toute leur vie pour se rendre où elles sont maintenant – je suis tellement prêt à jouer, » conclut Maryse.



www.louis-riel.cepeo.on.ca



Event: Men's Road Race
Age: 34
Hometown: Ottawa
Residence: Andorra
Local Club: Ottawa Lions
Track and Field Club
Second Olympics

MIKE WOODS CYCLING



@rusty_woods

See local Olympians' competition schedules at: ottawasportspages.ca/events

Tactics key for Mike Woods' success in Olympic cycling road race

By Martin Cleary

Long before Michael Woods was a record-breaking runner, a sub-four-minute miler and a gutsy pro cyclist climbing world-class mountains, he was like any other young Canadian kid.

The Hillcrest High School grad from Ottawa played hockey and aspired to skate in the NHL. His dream was even more specific as he wanted to play left wing for the Toronto Maple Leafs. Maybe, he's what the Leafs are missing.

As a hockey player, he understood the finer points of the game, including the situation of being short-handed, whether it was a few key players missing on the game roster or his team playing down a skater because of a penalty.

Well, Woods will face

a similar situation at the Musashinomori Park start line for the 234-kilometre Olympic men's cycling road race in northeastern Tokyo. He'll have two support riders, while key riders from some stronger countries will have four each.

Woods, the lead rider on the Israel Start-Up Nation squad who has the support of seven teammates at the current Tour de France, can only rely on Hugo Houle of Ste-Perpetue, Que., and Guillaume Boivin of Montreal at the Games.

Canada qualified a team of three riders for the men's Olympic road race based on international rankings at the end of 2019. That number matches the 2016 Rio Games team size. Canada only had one rider for the men's road race at the 2012 London Olympics. Na-

tions can have one to five riders for the road race.

Woods and Houle were pre-selected to the team in early 2020. Boivin was recently announced as the third rider. All three are in the Tour de France – Woods and Boivin, Israel Start-Up Nation; Houle, Astana-Premier Tech.

"Of course, to have a full team of five riders would be the best to help support Mike," Ottawa's Alex Cataford wrote in an email. "However, being a smaller cycling nation, Canada did well to qualify three spots."

Cataford, who rides professionally for Israel Start-Up Nation and also is supporting Woods during the Tour de France, was named by Cycling Canada as one of three men's road race non-travelling alternates.

"I believe this will be enough in the end to support Mike, but the team will need to adjust the tac-

tics accordingly," he added. "They may need to be a bit more conservative with the support riders early in the race to make sure Mike has guys around him in the last 100 kilometres, when it is more critical.

"Anyways, the team tactics at the Olympics is always a bit different compared to the professional peloton, given the much smaller team sizes, so the team will just have to be intelligent, when they use the limited support resources."

Woods also will have Steve Bauer calling the shots in the Canadian team car. Bauer, the Cycling Canada road sports director, won Canada's first Olympic road cycling medal, a silver, at the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles.

"We have gone all-in for Mike at the Olympics," Kris Westwood, Cycling Canada's high-performance director, wrote in an email.

"Both of his teammates will be riding 100 per cent to support him."

The Olympic men's road race is traditionally a single-day ultramarathon. In his first Olympics in Rio in 2016, an injured Woods placed 55th over the hilly 237.5-kilometre course, which suited his style.

"With such a mountainous course, the strategy is pretty simple: keep Mike safe, hydrated, fed and sheltered up to the 14-kilometre-long Fuji Sanroku climb, where we can expect the first major selection to take place over the top of this climb at 140 kilometres," Westwood added.

"Hopefully, one of Mike's teammates will make it over in the front group and can help place him for the critical Mikuni pass climb at 200K."

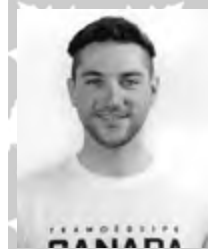
At this point, the final group should be formed and Woods can use his

"massive physiological capacity," as Cataford refers to it, to surge to the Fuji International Speedway finish, near the iconic Mount Fuji.

"I think the parcours [course] is challenging enough that if Mike has good legs on the day, he will be able to deliver a result," Cataford wrote. "There is a very hard climb with about 40 kilometres to go in the race, and I expect only a select group to make it over in the front.

"So, the strategy will be to help Mike conserve his energy until that last climb and then it will be up to him to go toe-to-toe with the other contenders."

"Mike is tough and we've put the right people around him," Westwood concluded. "Nothing is guaranteed in sport, but we think we have our best shot at a men's Olympic road medal since 1984."



Event: Men's Team Pursuit
Age: 27
Hometown: Cumberland
Residence: Calgary
Local Club: Ottawa Bicycle Club/Gloucester Concorde
Third Olympics (First Summer)

VINCENT DE HAÎTRE TRACK CYCLING



@vince_dehaitre

See local Olympians' competition schedules at: ottawasportspages.ca/events

Speed skater De Haître serving as engine for Canada's team pursuit cycling squad

By Martin Cleary

Vincent De Haître is Canada's 1,000-metre man. No Canadian has pedalled a bicycle or travelled in speed skates as fast over that atypical distance as this Cumberland, ON., native.

A three-time Canadian recordholder in track cycling's Kilo Time Trial, De Haître was the first national-team cyclist to go under one minute at altitude, when he blazed the Cochabamba, Bolivia, track in 2019 in 58.951 seconds.

He also holds the sea-level national kilo record, which he set almost six months later at the 2020 world track cycling championships in Berlin with a clocking of 1:00.018.

Take De Haître off the slick, aerodynamic bike and put him into a pair of long-track speed skates and he's almost as fast. He set the men's 1,000-metre Canadian record in February 2017, at 1:06.72.

Besides being a recordholder, De Haître also has been an accomplished athlete over a season of 1,000-metre races. In his last two World Cup speed skating seasons (2016-17

and 2017-18), he was among the best.

In 2016-17, he was second on the World Cup 1,000-metre list, scoring one first and a second in the season finale as well as a silver medal at the world championships. In 2017-18, three top-five results put him seventh overall.

On the cycling track, he placed fourth in the One-Kilometre Time Trial at the 2020 world championships, just over half a second (0.523) from the gold medal.

It's no wonder De Haître will become the 13th Canadian athlete to experience both a Winter and a Summer Olympics, when he completes that rare double-play in early August at the Tokyo Summer Games.

De Haître, who raced over 1,000 and 1,500 metres as a speed skater at the 2014 and 2018 Winter Olympics, has spent the past three years alternating his training with the Canadian track cycling and speed skating teams.

Training for two different sports throughout the year has been "immensely challenging" for De Haître. By racing in Tokyo and qualifying for Canada's 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic team, he'd set a record of another sort.

From the end of the Tokyo Summer Olympics until the Beijing Winter Games, there's only a 180-day turnaround. If De Haître makes the speed skating team, it will be the fastest

a Canadian has gone from one Games to the next.

But unlike his two Winter Olympic experiences, where he skated the 1,000 metres and could potentially do it again in Beijing, there will be no 1,000-metre assignment for De Haître at the Tokyo Summer Olympics.

Instead, De Haître will be the engine on the Canadian men's Team Pursuit squad as the Kilo Time Trial isn't part of the Olympic track cycling program in Tokyo. The last time the kilo was on the Olympic schedule was 2008.

"The kilo is an amazing event to watch," De Haître said. "Sprinters go to their limit. It's not a full out sprint, but you're holding your power longer. It makes for an interesting race."

De Haître is an interesting athlete. In speed skating, he's a cross of a sprinter and middle-distance racer. But in track cycling, he hasn't found the Olympic race that makes him feel comfortable just yet.

"There's no real race for me," said De Haître, who only gets to race the kilo at world championships and other international competitions. "There's nothing for me in [Olympic] cycling. But I know I can ride and I'm good at it."

At the moment, De Haître is very good at Team Pursuit, where four riders start a 4,000-metre race against the clock around a velodrome track and only three riders must finish to lock in a time.

De Haître has a specific role. He takes the speed squad out fast and holds on as long as he can. You can expect him to pull the Canadian riders through the opening 1,000 metres in a minute flat. That may be his Olympic kilo.

Once De Haître begins to power down about halfway through, he'll go to the back of the cycling conga line or pull off into the infield. Then endurance racer Derek Gee of Osgoode, ON., will take over with Michael Foley and Jay Lamoureux.

The squad of Gee, Lamoureux, De Haître and Foley broke the Canadian record at the 2019 Pan American Championships in Bolivia with an altitude ride of 3:49.974.

At the 2020 Berlin worlds (sea level), Canada was a disappointing 11th in 3:54.469, dropping its global ranking to eighth from fifth, but maintaining its Olympic qualifying berth. Canada last qualified in Team Pursuit at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.

Canada was shocked by the preparedness and performances of the top countries – champion Denmark, New Zealand, Italy and Australia – at the 2020 worlds. But Canada has improved during seven recent camps and race simulations.

"At our last training ride (June), we were three seconds faster than we were at [2020] worlds," De Haître said. "We have found improvements. That's an upside."



Event: Women's Team Pursuit
Age: 26
Local Club: Ottawa Bicycle Club
Hometown: Gatineau
First Olympics

ARIANE BONHOMME TRACK CYCLING



@arianebonhomme

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Bonhomme knows Canada's women's cyclists need to give their all for a successful 'end of an era'

By Kieran Heffernan

Gatineau-native Ariane Bonhomme and the rest of the Canadian women's team pursuit track cycling team know they need to achieve some impressive times if they hope to leave Tokyo as medalists.

The 4-kilometre team pursuit event is fairly new in women's cycling, and with that fact comes a lot of pressure for extremely high performance.

"A few teams have ridden very close to the world record in the last couple of years," Bonhomme said. "We know that the boundaries are constantly being pushed and we anticipate very much the world record to go down by a couple of seconds

[in Tokyo] — so we need to get ready for that."

At the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, the women's team pursuit was a 3K race with only three racers, but since 2016 it has been 4K and four racers. The fact that the category has only existed for a few years, combined with new training techniques and technology, means that teams are frequently recording lower and lower times. Even in the men's category, which has raced that distance for much longer, the world record keeps getting lower.

The last time Canada's competed together, in February 2020 at the Track Cycling World Championships in Berlin, Bonhomme was an alternate and didn't actually race. She's optimistic that won't be the case in Tokyo.

"I'm really hoping that I'll get a chance to race and I hope that I showed the coaches that I'm ready to do it," she said. It would be an advantage over other teams, she ex-



PHOTO: STEVE KINGSMAN

and Georgia Simmerling) have only been back training together since May in Milton, Ontario.

But, there might have even been an advantage to the time apart.

"It allowed every rider to train more individually and train their weaknesses and when we came back together last month, it was definitely evident that every girl was a lot stronger than they were last year at Worlds."

There are also benefits to the unconventional schedule leading up to these Olympics. Although Bonhomme said she's never gone that long without racing, the plus side is that the team hasn't had to travel overseas and hasn't had to lose training time in order to rest before races.

And last December, Bonhomme received funding from CanFund, an organization that aims to "fill a funding gap and give our Canadian athletes the financial support their need to train and compete for Canada."

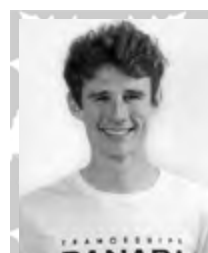
The extra support has really helped her stay focussed on the upcoming

games.

"It kind of allows me to put those thoughts of whether it's a good idea to keep racing [after Tokyo], to just put them on the back burner and think about it in a few months, and not have to worry about finding a job right away after the Games," she said.

Bonhomme hopes to be able to continue her racing career after these Olympics, despite most of her teammates' plans to retire from competition. That would position Bonhomme as a sort of bridge between generations of the team.

"I wish that we would keep going for another three years together because I really love them, but it's also kind of exciting to be more in like a veteran position for the upcoming [2024] Paris Games, and to pass down the knowledge and the legacy that we've built," she said. "I feel like it's a bit of the end of an era for this team that has been more or less together since London."



Events: Men's Team Pursuit & Madison
Age: 23
Hometown: Osgoode
Local Club: Ottawa Bicycle Club
First Olympics

DEREK GEE TRACK CYCLING



@derekgee97

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Track cyclist Derek Gee pedalling in two contrasting Olympic races

By Martin Cleary

Derek Gee's first Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo will be a challenge of contrasts. On one hand, he's immersed in track cycling's team pursuit. On the other hand, the marathon Madison is a mystery.

But the Osgoode, ON., athlete who has spent the past five years training at the national velodrome in Milton, ON., is ready to pursue a team pursuit medal and take the 50-kilometre Madison with team-pursuit partner Michael Foley as it comes.

"The team pursuit is the main focus of our program," Gee said in an interview. "It [Madison] will be quite the experience. Neither Mike nor I have ever even done a Madison in a World Cup. We're definitely covering all the bases."

When the Canadian team pursuit squad (average age 24 years) of Vincent De Haître of Cumberland, ON., Ottawa-born Foley of Milton, Jay Lamoureux of Victoria and Gee,

qualified for the Olympics with a world No. 8 ranking, there was a bonus.

Each of the eight men's team pursuit countries was allowed to enter a two-person team in the Madison, a 200-lap, ultramarathon. Since Gee and Foley had worked hand in hand and won multiple national titles, they earned a second Olympic race.

The Madison is a relay race, where riders take turns on the oval. After one rider's session, he'll return his teammate with a hand push, while going 60 kilometres an hour. Points are awarded to the top finishers in each of the 20 sprints.

"We knew in 2017 or 2018 when the quotas came out that we got a Madison spot. But we put it in the back of our minds," Gee continued. "We train about once a week between our team pursuit sessions, but it's an intense session."

Being an endurance rider, Gee isn't worried about the physical demands of the race. It's the technical part that concerns him most, connecting hands and flinging Foley or being flung by Foley to complete the smooth, relay exchange.

"There are 18 teams and there's a lot



FILE PHOTO

to do," said Gee, adding the non-racing rider must get back up to speed quickly, after

a brief rest on the track. "There's a massive change in speed that you have to navigate."

What's good about the Madison is it will be staged after the team pursuit, which is the main focus for Gee and his teammates. They have been working on their technique, strength and speed for the past five years.

Canada has shown well internationally in what has become a sprint-endurance race. At the last three world championships, Canada placed eighth in 2018, fourth (losing to Denmark for the bronze medal) in 2019 and a disappointing 11th in 2020.

At the 2018 Commonwealth Games, Gee won the team-pursuit bronze medal. He also has been a double, double gold medalist at the Pan Am Championships _ team pursuit and omnium in 2019 as well as team and individual pursuit in 2017.

"Team pursuit is something I've trained specifically for five years. It's our best chance. We've put all our eggs in that basket," said Gee, who will use his endurance to maintain the fast pace set by the powerful engine of De Haître.

Visit OttawaSportsPages.ca to read a longer story on Derek Gee.



Event:
Women's Doubles
Age: 29
Hometown: Ottawa
Residence:
Tampa Bay, Florida
Second Olympics

GABY DABROWSKI

TENNIS




@gabydabrowski

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Gaby Dabrowski reuniting with Sharon Fichman for women's doubles at Olympics

By Martin Cleary

Ottawa's Gabriela Dabrowski is off to her second Olympics, which she calls "my top priority." Her Tokyo tennis trip for women's doubles can also be viewed as a reunion.

For the first time in six years, Dabrowski will be reunited at the Summer Games with former doubles partner Sharon Fichman of Toronto. That's the longest period they've ever played apart, after having a good run of success.

The Dabrowski-Fichman team was notable on the International Tennis Federation circuit from 2007 to 2013 before becoming part of Tennis Canada's Federation Cup (now Billie Jean King Cup) squad in

2014 and 2015.

In July 2013, they won their first professional women's doubles title at the \$50,000 ITF Waterloo Challenger. A month later at the WTA's Rogers Cup in Toronto, the 22-year-olds elevated their games to astonishing heights.

Wild-card women's singles entries who also played in the doubles draw during Canada's most prestigious pro tournament, Dabrowski and Fichman defeated the top seeds and reached the semifinals.

Dabrowski and Fichman, who had international highlight moments in their junior careers, defeated the 2013 world No. 1 doubles team of Sara Errani and Roberta Vinci, who also were top-10 singles players.

Aiming to become the first Canadian winners of the women's doubles since 1969, their tournament three-match winning streak was ended by Jelena Jankovic and Katari-



PHOTO: STEVE KINGSMAN

na Srebotnik 7-5, 6-3, in the semifinals.

"It shows we do have a good level of doubles together, but I don't think it necessarily means anything certain going forward," Dabrowski said, following their upset quarter-final victory.

For the next two years, Tennis Canada tabbed Dabrowski and Fichman as its doubles team for Fed Cup World Group II action in 2014 and 2015. But by May, 2016, injuries forced Fichman out of

May. It was her fifth straight loss in a final going back to 2019 Wimbledon.

Fichman has fared well in 2021, reaching the Australian Open quarterfinals (a personal best), winning the Internazionali BNL D'Italia tournament in Rome and reaching the third round at the French Open and Wimbledon.

"I have no idea," Dabrowski wrote in an email interview, when asked about their return to playing. "All I know is that we are both very dedicated to improving our games so I am sure we will work hard to make each other better."

"At this time of the year, it's most important to be fresh physically and mentally. I think we will only need a few practices together to figure out how to maximize our strengths and what we should be looking to do tactically."

Dabrowski added she expects they'll "play proper doubles." What that means is "we

are aggressive at the net and (will) try to make the court feel small for our opponents with our positioning and shot selection."

From 2007 until 2013, Dabrowski and Fichman reached seven ITF Circuit women's doubles finals, winning the 2007 and 2010 Toronto Challenger, the 2013 Weisbaden tournament and the 2013 Waterloo Challenger.

Dabrowski also got to learn about Fichman's doubles game, when she played against her in two ITF tournaments in 2012. Fichman's partner at that time was Canadian Marie-Eve Pelletier.

On the main WTA circuit, Dabrowski has appeared in 20 women's doubles finals, emerging nine times as champion. In May 2019, Dabrowski and China's Xu Yifan defeated Fichman and Nicole Melichar in three sets at the Nuremberg Cup.



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Event:
Women's K-4 500 m
Age: 26
Hometown: Ottawa
Residence: Halifax
Local Club: Ottawa River & Rideau Canoe Club

MADDY SCHMIDT

CANOE-KAYAK




@maddycschmidt

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ottawasportspages.ca/events

One Schmidt cousin headed to Summer Olympics, two more could join for Winter

By Dan Plouffe

Arne and Judy Schmidt are grateful for the Tokyo Olympic canoe-kayak schedule – they'll be able to watch their granddaughter Maddy race during the evening back home in North Bay.

Oftentimes, morning races in Europe means they've got to be up in the middle of the night to watch their grandchildren compete – and that's a year-round undertaking with Maddy's cousins Jared and Hannah racing in international ski cross events – but they tune in every time no matter what.

"They're big, big, big supporters," underlines Hannah, 26. "They're always there for us."

The proud grandparents still go for long bike rides themselves, and count the number of ski runs they do in a year.

"They're superheroes," smiles 25-year-old Maddy, who clinched her ticket to Tokyo in March (see OttawaSportsPages.ca for the full story). "They're such athletes, as grandparents. It's pretty impressive."

The elder Schmidts love for sport became



(From left) Maddy, Hannah & Jared Schmidt. FILE PHOTOS

further amplified when their boys found partners who shared their passion for every outdoor sport under the sun – Bevin (with L.A.) and Brent (with Louise).

"What they all have in common is that they just love to go out and play," highlights Maddy, whose mom Louise was a national team paddler. "That joy for being outside and, and just being in the elements, that's something our family has definitely taught us."

Growing up, Arne and Judy's Ottawa-based grandchildren were practically inseparable.

Along with Maddy's older brother Emmett, who is now an airplane mechanic, they'd always go camping, paddling or skiing together. "It is super special to have them so close to home," signals 23-year-old Jared, who has more cousins around Toronto. "And we're so fortunate that we're healthy and all of us share the love for outdoor sports. It's pretty awesome."

Maddy's journey to the Olympics began at the Ottawa River Canoe Club, founded by her aunt L.A. in Dunrobin, and her first compet-

itive paddling partner was of course Hannah.

"We would spend every second together," recalls Maddy, who still messages her cousins frequently even though sport has drawn them to opposite ends of the country (Maddy in Dartmouth, N.S. and Jared/Hannah in Calgary), not to mention across the globe for competitions.

"Seeing those two thrive in skiing is so neat, and such an inspiration too," adds Maddy, whose first Olympic K-4 women's 500-metre race takes place the evening of Aug. 5 in Canada (morning of Aug. 6 in Tokyo).

Six months later, Arne and Judy may well be making similar time zone calculations should Jared and/or Hannah make it to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

Having transitioned from alpine racing, Jared and Hannah are relative newcomers to ski cross and still see 2026 as their greater shot to reach for the rings, but breakthrough performances last season launched them into consideration for the 2022 Canadian Olympic team as well.

"It was super exciting to see Maddy qualify for the Olympics. She's worked tremendously hard," Jared stresses. "If we can hopefully get a couple of her cousins at the Winter Olympics, that would be pretty sweet."

Gilbert: Success at Olympics as an athlete paved way for post-competition career

cont'd from p.10

Gilbert's been Athletics Canada's head coach since 2017. As well as enjoying the opportunity to pass on what he's learned over the years, he said his being in this position can encourage more diversity in the organization.

"Former athletes, or athletes that are in there now, can look to track and field and look to athletics as maybe (where) there's a career opportunity for them ... (because) they can see that Athletics Canada has a Black head coach," Gilbert said.

After retiring from sprinting in 2001, Gilbert worked as a journalist for a year – another opportunity opened up to him thanks to his historic success on the track.

Miriam Fry, who was the program direc-

tor with CBC Radio at the time, offered him a position as a community reporter.

"She'd listened to some of the interviews that I'd done and really thought that I would bring something to that position, if given the opportunity," Gilbert said. "I do like to talk to people, I do like to hear people's stories."

"Even though I only did it for a year I had a blast doing it because I met some of the most amazing people: from athletes, to former military people, to an 80-year-old belly dancer."

His work at CBC made Gilbert realize the similarities between reporting and being an athlete.

"When I started, I thought it'd be pretty straightforward and easy," he said. "But it's not. Just like anything. People can look at athletes doing their craft

and say, 'well that looks pretty straightforward,' but then when you get into it, you start realizing more and more. To be really good requires all the same things of perseverance, dedication, research, hard work, (and) understanding what you're talking about."

Just as his job as a reporter involved telling peoples stories, Gilbert, as a coach, tries to remember that there's also a story behind every athlete. This is especially pertinent given the struggles the past year and a half has brought.

"I'm not just simply about the performance," he said. "So when you see someone arrive at a Games or on a podium somewhere, there is a backstory to it, and you always have to be cognizant of that and handle the athletes, and the coaches, with respect and dignity."

Brown: '[It's] always been my goal to compete in the Olympics.'

continued from p.11

The good result wasn't the only memory Brown carried from that eventful race. Before the race, she fractured her nose and after the race a kidney infection was starting to turn nasty as she prepared to fly to the next meet in Lisbon.

"The kidney infection was a lot more severe after the race. I had a super bad fever and was in hospital in Portugal," said Brown, who had the full support of Triathlon Canada officials in Lisbon and in Canada.

"I've definitely recovered ... it wasn't ideal for a build up (to the Olympics). Training for the next seven weeks taking antibiotics wasn't ideal, but I fought back well," said Brown, who apologized to teammates for missing the key race.

Brown meant to race with the Canadian team to try to qualify for the mixed relay race at the Tokyo Summer Olympics. Despite the team withdrawal, Canada qualified because its top two men and top two women were highly ranked as individuals.

The trip to the Tokyo Olympics for her first Summer Games has been much anticipated by Brown. She hopes the strict health and safety protocols in Japan will keep her and her peers in a positive environment before their races.

"I have been waiting to compete (in the Olympics) since the day I started triathlon," said Brown, the 2010 world junior championship and 2012 world U23 championship bronze medalist. "It has always been my goal to compete in the

Olympics.

"When I was with coach Greg Kealey (Bytown Storm Triathlon), it was something I dreamed of. When I was with Craig Taylor (Guelph triathlon coach), it was something that pushed me through every session."

Entering the Olympics, Brown, who didn't qualify for the 2016 Olympics as she missed the entire 2015 season, is ranked No. 29 in the women's individual competition and has helped Canada achieve a No. 9 ranking in the mixed relay classification.

"I definitely feel ready, ready for what it brings. I feel relaxed and I'm excited to see what Tokyo is like," she added. "I'm excited to see what happens. I've put in hard work and it's time to get out there and see it pay off."



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- OTTAWA AT THE OLYMPICS & COMMUNITY -

Second-generation shooter Kiejko returning to site of father’s first Olympic appearance

By Martin Cleary

Canada will send only one shooting athlete to the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo. That honour belongs to Winchester, ON-born Lynda Kiejko, who did it all and more to hit that target.

Kiejko, 40, qualified for her second straight national Olympic team by winning the 2018 Continental Championships women's 10-metre Air Pistol (giving Canada a berth in the Games) and beating four other athletes at the 2020 team trials.

That was hard enough for the Calgary resident, but she won the Olympic trials four months after delivering her third child. But she's used to it. After her 2016 Rio Olympics, she had her second child before the 2018 Continental meet.

While Kiejko will be the sole Canadian shooter (10-metre Air Pistol and 25-metre Pistol) at the Asaka Shooting Range, she knows she won't be alone training and competing each day. The presence of her deceased father will be with her:

Rev. Bill Hare travelled to the same shooting range to compete in men's pistol shooting during the 1964 Summer Games in Tokyo. He also went on to compete at the 1968 and 1972 Games as well.

"While I was searching for something, I

GEE-GEE GRAD TO PLAY FOR NIGERIA

University of Ottawa Gee-Gees alum Caleb Agada will play for the Nigerian men's basketball team in Tokyo.

OttawaSportsPages.ca will have a story on Agada by HIGH ACHIEVERS columnist Martin Cleary.



FILE PHOTO

came across a small keychain medallion that my dad brought back from the Tokyo Olympics," Kiejko wrote in an email interview. "I have put it on my keychain to take with me, not for luck, but as a reminder of how special it is that I get to compete 57 years after he did."

Hare, a United Church of Canada minister who served in Admaston Township, which is part of Renfrew Country, before moving his family to Alberta, introduced shooting to his daughters Lynda and Dorothy (now Ludwig).

He gave Lynda and Dorothy the necessary tools to understand and enjoy pistol shooting and they made the most of it. Dorothy qualified for the 2012 London Olympic team for Canada and Lynda participated in the 2016 Rio Games with Tokyo on the horizon.

Nicknamed the Pistol Packing Preacher, Hare had a shooting range in the basement of the family house, which helped him get to three Olympics, Commonwealth and Pan Am Games and world championships. His best Olympic result was 15th at the 1968 Mexico City Games in 50-metre Free Pistol.

"I am very excited about competing in Tokyo. The Olympics always held a special place in his heart, and he really enjoyed Tokyo," added Kiejko, who remembers her dad telling many stories of his travels, but can't recall the Tokyo ones.

It has been five years since her last Olympics, but Kiejko has used her time well. She delivered her second and third children and completed a Certificate in Business at the Smith School of Business at Queen's University.

She did all of that while training for and competing in national and international pistol shooting competitions and maintaining her job as a civil engineer.

With the 2020 Olympics postponed for one year and competitions cancelled, there was no need to travel. That meant Kiejko could spend more time with her young family.



"I have missed shoulder-to-shoulder competition internationally this year. I feel like it would have aided in my preparations. I have made the most of it, found time to test my processes and be able to prepare for quality training," she explained.

"There are a lot of things that would have been easier without the pandemic. I have just chosen to look at the benefits and search for solutions for the challenges that have arisen rather than dwell on a problem."

Kiejko finished 38th in the 10-metre Air Pistol and 25-metre Pistol competitions at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

"For me to feel successful (in Tokyo), I will be present in the moment of each shot, without judgment, and with perfect process to the shot execution. I cannot control how other people perform, only my own performance," she added.

"This is a strange year and it's hard to say how the world's best will shine on the day of competition at the Olympics."

CAPITAL REGION OLYMPIANS

Like Kiejko, a number of Team Canada Olympians hail from the wider national capital region, or have past connections to Ottawa,

including:

- A pair of cyclists – Gatineau resident Karol-Ann Canuel (road) and The Cyclery women's cycling team alum Annie Foreman-Mackey (track).
- Childhood friends Brooke Henderson (golf) and Bailey Andison (swimming) of Smiths Falls.
- Christine Roper, who registers with the Ottawa Rowing Club.
- Like her role model Melissa Bishop-Nriagu, Pembroke's Madeleine Kelly will run in the women's 800 m.
- Kadeisha Buchanan was one women's national team player who appeared for the now-defunct Ottawa Fury W-League soccer team before earning a starring role with Team Canada.

- Mixed doubles partners Mo Zhang and Eugene Wang (plus coach Hongtao Chen) lived in Ottawa when the table tennis national training centre was located in Trenttown.
- Perth's Amy Millar is an equestrian alternate.

- Glenn Hoag will have a front-row seat to watch his son Nicholas play volleyball at a second consecutive Olympics. That's because he's the coach for Team Canada.

Martin Cleary explores their relationship in this full story at OttawaSportsPages.ca.

LOCAL OLYMPIC TEAM ALTERNATES

Four Ottawa athletes were also named Olympic team alternates:

- Jessica Gaudreault (water polo)
- Josh King (rowing)
- Merissah Russell (basketball)
- Alex Cataford (road cycling)

Martin Cleary will tell some of these athletes' stories in his OLYMPIC OH SO CLOSE online series at OttawaSportsPages.ca and on Twitter @martincleary.

— with files from Dan Plouffe

the creation of the House of Sport, which houses the offices of almost forty sport organizations, including Hockey Canada and the Ottawa Sport Council.

The completion of Phase 2 is still a ways away, but as early as October some other facility changes will open. The RA announced in early June that the centre would no longer be hosting hockey programs. The hockey arena will be instead turned into a curling rink, and the former curling space converted to year-round pickleball courts.

The goal for both these changes is to fill gaps within the Ottawa sports community. Elaine Brimicombe, who has been a member of the RA's curling club for about 30 years and is also chair of Ontario Curling Association, is particularly excited about what the new curling centre means.

"It is our intent to complement other organizations, not to compete against

RA continues next page



Runner Keegan Gaunt aiming for Canada's Paralympic team, like her mom did in cycling

By Martin Cleary



vision has recently classified her as a para runner.

Gaunt, 21, has Stargardt Disease, which attacked her central vision five years ago and has left her with blind spots in her sight. Its progression has been gradual since she was 16. Young adults can inherit it from a parent.

Gaunt's mother, Robbi Weldon, was diagnosed with Stargardt Disease as a teenager and is now legally blind. But Weldon, who loved sports in her youth, rediscovered

sports as an adult and competed in four Paralympic Games.

Gaunt wants to follow her mother's lead, but not in cross-country skiing or cycling, where Weldon won a 2012 Paralympic gold medal in the tandem road race with guide and former Canadian Olympian Lyne Bessette.

Athletics is the main focus for Gaunt, who took a big stride in hoping to qualify for her first Canadian Paralympic team at the late-June Athletics Canada track and field championships and Olympic trials in Montreal.

Paced by Vancouver's Jenna Melanson, Gaunt was the only runner in the women's T13-class 1,500 metres and she broke the long-standing national record with a time of 4:57.54. The old mark was set by Ottawa's Norah Good at 5:16.20 in 1984.



That time placed her seventh in the International Paralympic Committee world rankings.

"It's not my personal-best (time), but given it's my first race in a while and coming off an injury, I'm happy

Martin Cleary's HIGH ACHIEVERS: Stay Safe Edition column appears online 5 days a week. At the bottom of this page are snippets of recent stories. For more like this, and to read the full versions of the columns, visit OttawaSportsPages.ca

to get that time under my belt," Gaunt said after the competition.

Gaunt, who competes for and sits on the Guelph-based Royal City Athletics Club's board of directors as the athlete representative, recently recovered from a left tibia stress fracture. She only had two track workouts before her first race.

A confident Gaunt followed her plan to stay with Melanson, who pulled off to the side of the track for the final 100 metres.

"I was very excited, given I hadn't raced in 1.5 years and I was back on track to see where my fitness was," said Gaunt, who later ran 4:43.08 in mid-July to all-but-guarantee her place on Canada's Paralympic team; her time was deemed by Athletics Canada to be of world top-8 standard.

Weldon, who represented

Canada at the 2010 and 2014 Winter Paralympics and the 2012 and 2016 Summer Paralympics, retired from competitive para cycling in 2020 at age 45. But Gaunt hopes to keep the family Paralympic streak alive.

"Both of my parents were visually impacted," added Gaunt, who attended Merivale High School and raced for the Ottawa Lions Track and Field Club. "My mom is a four-time Paralympian and I have been exposed to that world.

"My mom had a big impact on me. I went to the London 2012 Paralympics and was able to watch her win the gold medal. It was a big moment."

Look for our Ottawa at the Paralympics special edition in the next Ottawa Sports Pages.

'We're the whole family's RA' is the guiding philosophy behind RA Centre redevelopment

Hockey rink to become arena-style curling centre, year-round pickleball takes over curling ice, health centre sought in next phase of evolution

By Kieran Heffernan

The RA Centre is trying to shed the reputation it gained back when it was a recreation club exclusively for federal public servants, and show that it's keeping up with the times and the needs of its community.

"I often say, we're not just your grandfather's RA anymore, we're the whole family's RA," said the centre's CEO Tosha Rhodenizer. "People think that we're kind of an older demographic, and service a very narrow demographic. In fact, we're expanding that, and have been for the past several years."

That expansion has taken shape literally in the form of plans for a 200,000 square foot facility, called the Ca-

nadian Sport for Life & Rehabilitation Centre. Some of its main goals will be to encourage people of all ages and abilities to participate in sport and promote the integration of health and sport.

"We're not just talking about physio and massage therapy," Rhodenizer said. "We're going to be talking about cardiac rehab, we're going to be talking about pre/post joint replacement. Activities and healthcare provision that is complementary to evening and weekend sport and rec activity that happens."

The architecture itself will be designed to improve, maintain, or slow the decline of physical literacy of its users, as well as promote socialization.



"[The design will] ensure that there are multiple areas for people to interact with each other, to connect with each other, recognizing the social fabric and experience of sport is essential," Rhodenizer explained. "Lots of little nooks and crannies, lots of places to just be."

More funding is still

needed for this new facility, but once that has been secured, Rhodenizer estimates that about a year of planning will be needed, followed by 18 months of construction.

The Canadian Sport for Life & Rehabilitation Centre makes up Phase 2 of the RA's long-term revitalization plan. Phase 1 consisted of

them," Rhodenizer said, explaining, for example, that there is a need for mid-market curling facilities – many others in Ottawa are either clubs that tend to mostly target seniors (which is what the RA formerly housed) or high-level arenas such as the Canadian Tire Centre or TD Place. Soon, the RA will be able to host a much wider variety of curling programs such as youth, para and stick-curling.

Elaine Brimicombe, who has been a member of the RA's curling club for about 30 years and is also chair of Ontario Curling Association, is particularly excited about what the new curling centre means.

plement other organizations, not to compete against



With designs on making a sixth career appearance at the Paralympic Games this summer, Jason Dunkerley blasted out of retirement at an Ottawa Lions Track and Field Club Twilight meet in June. The 43-year-old later ran 4:16.51 in the 1,500 m to put himself in excellent position to earn a place on Team Canada. Dunkerley owns 5 medals from his 5 previous Paralympics.



One of Canada's top-level athletics officials for more than 50 years, Munster's Barclay Frost was recognized during the Ottawa High Performance track and field meet at Terry Fox Athletic Facility in early June. Frost, refereed field events as he visited his second home for the first time in almost two years, and then celebrated his 80th birthday the next day.



There was a lot of solitary training throughout COVID for Madeleine Lauriault, but the Ottawa Rowing Club athlete nevertheless managed to earn a place on Team Canada for the Aug. 11-15 world junior championships in Bulgaria. Lauriault clinched her berth thanks to a strong performance on her home erg rowing machine, which she set up in the family laundry room.



Glebe Gryphons athlete Zoe Gardiner received the OFSAA Character Athlete Award at the end of this past school year. Gardiner, who participates in cross-country running, rugby, soccer, athletics and touch football at Glebe Collegiate Institute, was also recognized for her leadership and initiative with student council, helping her peers, and being active in her community.

RA CENTRE: New stadium-style curling centre could serve as host to mid-size tournaments

continued from p.6

"I was really thrilled that they're taking this almost a leap of faith to show that they are 110% committed to curling," she said.

The updated facility will be able to function as more than just a local community club.

"We'll be able to use some of the downtime that we might traditionally have on a weekend to host a couple more events at the RA, because the new curling facility is just a lot more accommodating to having something like live streaming of a competition," Brimicombe explained.

The centre is scheduled to open in late October, but

construction will continue beyond then.

"The first year is focused on the on-ice experience. The stadium ice will be in, it'll be that Brier-type quality. But the wraparound services, the things like lounges, enhanced changing facilities, the food services, those will be a work in progress over the next two to three years," said Kelly Shaw-Swettenham, the RA's director of recreation, sport and fitness services.

Making the decision to discontinue hockey programs at the RA was difficult, Rhodenizer said.

"We've had a number of our members that have been playing hockey since



the hockey arena was built in 1978," she noted, adding that many of the staff working with the leagues, rentals, and officiating had also been with the RA for decades. But

ultimately, it was too difficult to break even in a facility with only a single ice pad; most hockey arenas today are multi-pad, Rhodenizer highlighted.

PICKLEBALL POWER

The RA is instead pivoting their focus to another sport. Pickleball has been called the fastest-growing sport in Canada, but Ottawa currently has no year-round courts. The RA's new facility will allow for many more participants, as well as more programs for different ages and abilities including junior, high performance, para and hybrid standing and wheelchair programs.

"Drop-in play at community centres is oversubscribed in the daytime with long line-ups and capacity issues. So the RA will be an option now, as well as a way

for youth and para athletes to play. This is a welcome development," said Lynn Campbell, vice-president of communications at the Ottawa Pickleball Association.

Pickleball at the RA used to be held on the badminton courts. Their new facility is set to open in mid-October.

Shaw-Swettenham reiterates that all the changes coming the RA, long and short term, have the same goals in mind.

"Recreation, and being active, and socialization, and supportive communities, and inclusivity – anything new, any new facilities, any expansion, they really need to speak to those pieces."

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- EDITORIAL & ELITE -

Y YMCA-YWCA OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION STARS OF THE MONTH

Athletes of the Month: Isaiah and Atlas Ibit

About: A golf simulator in the dining room helped Isaiah and Atlas Ibit keep their swings through winter during COVID times and ultimately boosted both brothers to Ottawa Valley Golf Association junior medal-play championships wins in mid-June. With travel plans cancelled because of COVID-19 restrictions, the Ibit boys' parents purchased a SkyTrak golf simulator to give their junior golfers a Merry Christmas. They took turns hitting balls off a large green mat into a wide, eight-foot-high net, which had plenty of protective padding and cushions behind it. Isaiah posted the best score out of the juvenile and junior divisions, while Atlas won the OVGA bantam championship at the tournament played at eQuinelle Golf Club and Pakenham Highlands Golf Club. See OttawaSportsPages.ca for more detailed coverage.

E-mail editor@sportsottawa.com to nominate your Stars! Courtesy of the YMCA-YWCA of the National Capital Region, the selected Stars of the Month will receive free passes to the Y.

Despite a summer of setbacks, Graddy Kanku is keeping his eye on the ball

By Madalyn Howitt

Having already experienced some of the exhilarating highs and disappointing lows of pursuing a career in basketball, Graddy Kanku has learned how to roll with the punches.

In the wake of an unpredictable year with limited opportunities for varsity-level athletes to play and develop, the Ontario Tech Ridgebacks guard was excited to take a significant step this summer toward his goal of becoming a professional basketball player.

An impressive run with the Ridgebacks in their inaugural season saw the Ottawa-raised guard named to the OUA's 2019-20 all-rookie team. His early success made Kanku an obvious choice to join the Canadian Elite Basketball League's U Sports program, which provides pro experience to 21 Canadian university basketball players.

In April, Kanku was drafted to play with his hometown BlackJacks for the summer and was looking forward to playing alongside pros including NBA and NBA G-League veterans, Canadian national team members and stars from other international leagues.

Yet when the BlackJacks tipped off on June 24 against the Niagara River Lions in their first game of the season, Kanku was not on the court with his fellow recruits.

"I had some problems at home [that made it difficult] for me to be there for the whole summer, so I had to withdraw from the

program," said Kanku, who had hoped to channel his increasing momentum in the sport and learn everything he could from the BlackJacks' more experienced players. "I had a heart-to-heart conversation with them about my situation, and they'll give me some time off to get right. I really appreciate the kind of care and love that they showed me," he said of the team.

It's an unfortunate bump in the road to a professional career in sports that would have shaken some other players — when unexpected personal circumstances sideline your dreams on the court, bouncing back from disappointment can deter even the most talented players. But the 22-year-old Kanku is used to overcoming adversity and still has his sights set on basketball stardom.

"I want to be specific about what I want, and that's playing in the NBA," Kanku said.

Kanku's path to a career in sports wasn't always clear. His parents emigrated from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the 1990s, settling first in Montreal where Kanku was born and later moving to Ottawa. After dabbling in basketball throughout his childhood, Kanku finally started playing on organized teams when he was about 11 years old, playing with the Britannia Woods basketball program run by local coach and educator Emil O'Neill.

The program was designed for disadvantaged youth to gain experience playing organized sports in the summers. O'Neill said Kanku



PHOTO PROVIDED

showed early promise as not just a talented athlete but also as a role model for other young players.

"He's had to overcome a lot of personal as well as systemic barriers to be where he is," O'Neill said. "We started to see a player emerge that not many people were anticipating saw, and I was happy to help him develop."

Even so, Kanku admitted it was tough at first to get his family on board with his ambitions.

"I don't think my family quite took it seriously until I joined CTA [Canada Topflight Academy]," he said.

CTA is Ottawa's team in the National Preparatory Association, which was founded in 2016 to be a Canadian alternative to U.S. private schools and academies, which have become an increasingly popular stepping stone to post-secondary and pro play for elite players.

Kanku said after seeing him play at an elite level, his mother Esther became very supportive of his dreams. "She started investing in me and was financing my time with CTA. That was tremendous, having that support from my mom."

worked with Kanku as an assistant coach for the Ridgebacks and witnessed Kanku's development as a player with initial raw talent, and then with refined skills and sportsmanship.

"He put it all together very quickly once he started to dedicate himself a little bit more [at Ontario Tech]. He became like a professional," O'Neill said. "He understands how to put a schedule together, how to have an offseason. We're looking at a guy now who will be able to make some money playing basketball."

He said he won't be surprised to see Kanku back on the court soon, continuing to work towards both his career goals and a potential future as a mentor.

"To me [the U.S.] was the best place to train, but when I came back to Canada, I kind of had a revelation that there's also a lot of talent here that's not broadcast as much," he said.

Highlighting the country's homegrown talents is in fact a priority of the CEBL — with 75 per cent of its current rosters being Canadians, it has the highest percentage of Canadian players of any professional league in the country. That's why even though he won't be joining them on the court this summer, Kanku is grateful to have made a connection with the BlackJacks and CEBL, given the upwards trajectory of basketball's popularity in Canada.

O'Neill has no doubt that his mentee will get other opportunities to play at a high level. Having already coached him as a teenager, O'Neill also



PHOTO PROVIDED

- ELITE -

David's success benefitting Ottawa soccer

By Madalyn Howitt

Since leaving Ottawa's soccer pitches for the professional leagues of Europe, Jonathan David has quickly become one of the brightest stars in soccer.

The forward for Lille OSC in the French Ligue 1 division and member of the Canadian men's national team has accomplished in three short years what takes many players their entire careers to achieve.

As an 18-year-old, David became the youngest Canadian to ever score for the men's national team. At 21, he is now approaching the Canadian men's national team's all-time goal scoring record. He also helped carry Lille its first Ligue 1 championship title in a decade this season.

Playing in four matches in June for Canada, David kept a goal-a-game pace, thanks largely to a hat trick against Suriname on June 8.

While personally shut-out, David also played near full games in a two-leg series against Haiti last month — an opponent that David said in an interview with TSN is "always special" to play against, given that it's where his parents are from and where he spent part of his childhood.

Canada beat Haiti 4-0 on aggregate in those matches, securing the team a spot in the final round of Concacaf World Cup qualifiers. Canada will now compete against sev-



PHOTO: ABEL ARCINIEGA / CANADA SOCCER

en remaining North American, Central American and Caribbean teams for one of three available spots at the 2022 World Cup. Those matches will be played from September to next March between breaks in the international schedule.

Here in Ottawa, David's former coaches aren't surprised by the mounting success he's had on the international stage.

They say not only was his exceptional talent clear early on, but his humble personality indicated he had the integrity to make it far in the professional world of soccer.

"He was exactly the type of player you want to coach; he listens and takes advice," said Hanny El-Magraby, the senior coach for Ottawa's Mundial FC. El-Magraby coached David for most of his youth soccer career, first with the Gloucester Hornets and then with the Ottawa Internationals.

That openness to learning and being mentored also

helped him excel as a student athlete in Louis Riel Public High School's unique sports-study program, which has helped train other elite local athletes like Vanessa Gilles, who will play for Canada's women's soccer team at the Tokyo Olympics.

Joé Fournier is the program director of soccer at Louis-Riel and remembers David as a quiet but dedicated player.

"He wasn't a hard player to coach. He was extremely passionate," Fournier said, adding that it was an amazing feeling watching David play his first international game on TV. "He was the type of student that would show up early and would leave late because he wanted to get as much time as possible on the field with the ball."

David is not only shining as a leader with Lille and Team Canada, but also as a positive example for young soccer players in his hometown of

- SPORTS PAGES SNAPSHOTS -

SHANNON DONNELLY NAMED HEAD COACH OF LADY 67'S

The Ottawa Girls Hockey Association announced at the end of June that Ottawa-native Shannon Donnelly would be the head coach of the Lady 67's U22 program. Donnelly was the starting goalie for the Neumann University Knights until she graduated in 2013. She holds the school's records for most wins, games played, and best goals against average. Since then, she's coached for the CIH Hockey Academy, the 67's U15AA and U18AA teams, and the Nepean GHA.

RIDEAU CANOE CLUB WILL STAGE NATIONALS

Rideau Canoe Club and Canoe Kayak Canada have decided to go ahead with the Nation Sprint Championships this summer, with some modifications. The August 23 to 29 event will only involve singles races. Athletes will be in zones to allow for physical distancing, and the days will be divided by age and gender. There also might not be an spectators. The championships will also double as the national team trials for the junior and U23 world championships, Olympic Hopes Regatta and the world senior championships.

OVGA ANNOUNCES HALL OF FAME INAUGURAL CLASS

Ten golfers and four builders have been named to the Ottawa Valley Golf Association Hall of Fame, which was created this year to celebrate 100 years of amateur golf in the region. All of the inductees were amateur or pro champions. The hall will be hosted on the OVGA's website.

The golfer inductees are Diane Dolan, Alexa Stirling Fraser, Robert Fugere, Eric Kaufmanis, Karl Kaspar Keffer, Margaret Masters, Alison Murdoch, Greg Olson, Helen Paget Holmes and Brian Vance.

The builder inductees are the Ottawa Hunt and Golf Club, the Rivermead Golf Club, the Royal Ottawa Golf Club and S.F.M. (Swatty) Wotherspoon.

OUA ANNOUNCES 2021-22 LEAGUE AND CHAMPIONSHIP FORMATS

Ontario University Athletics has outlined its return-to-play strategy for the upcoming year, which includes all varsity sports. It will involve fewer regular season games, more regional competition, caps on exhibition games and training camp adjustments. The goal is to minimize travel and overnight stays. The OUA is also recommended that everyone involved in games and events get vaccinated when able to.

ATHLETES NAMED FOR 2021 FEI N.A. YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS

Equestrian Canada has named three Ottawa area athletes to the national team for the 2021 FEI North American Youth Championships. The competition will be held August 9 to 15 in Traverse City, Michigan. Taylor Wood and Livia Martin, both from Manotick, will be competing in the children's jumping category. Sasha Maniaci from Ottawa will be competing in the junior jumping category.

Ottawa.

"I think Ottawa has an opportunity to be a real source of talent for Canada," said El-Magraby. "[Soccer] is a very difficult sport to break into, especially in Canada. Seeing Jonathan succeed helps you reinforce with the next generation of players what they need to do."

Fournier has found that his students are becoming more interested in following international soccer leagues in the way that they follow other professional sports.

He credits David with be-

ing one of the reasons why the sport is gaining popularity in the city.

"His impact on soccer in Ottawa is huge. Jonathan is a big part of this [Canadian team's] success, and I think they're going have a huge influence on the future of the sport."

El-Magraby also sees his youth players with Mundial FC watching David closely. "They feel like they're cheering for one of their own. They're always watching to see what he's going to do next," he said.

Through the fall and winter, David will surely be front and centre as Canada competes in the Concacaf final round qualifiers for the World Cup, which Canada made it to last in 1997.

Beyond hopes of a World Cup appearance next year though, Fournier and El-Magraby have no doubts that David will continue his meteoric rise in the sport.

"I think the sky is really the limit to achieve anything he really wants to achieve," said El-Magraby. "He can be one of the best players in the world in a very short time."



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