

Local rugby athlete competes at Canada Summer Games

Written By Brian Lockhart

A local high school athlete has turned four years of rugby experience into a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity after being selected to represent Team Ontario at the Canada Summer Games.

Lauren Smith, who graduated from Centre Dufferin District High School (CDDHS) this year, competed in the Games in St. John's, Newfoundland, from Aug. 11 to 13.

Lauren began playing rugby in her first year at CDDHS and had also grown up playing hockey, so she competed on the high school team.

"I started playing rugby in Grade 9," Lauren said. "I got into it because of the support of my family and some of my teachers. The first year I played I was pretty nervous because I considered myself to be a hockey player. I like both sports for different reasons, but right now my focus is on rugby."

Outside of school, Lauren started playing hockey with an elite team and competed at the Ontario Summer Games with Team NRU (Niagara Rugby Union).

The chance to try out for Team Ontario meant she was competing against over 400 other girls to make the final cut. Only 12 players made the team.

"For the Canada Games they held tryouts over a year," Lauren explained. "After each tryout you had to make the cut."

For the Canada Summer Games, they played Rugby Sevens. This is a different version of rugby where only seven players are on the field from each team.

This makes for a fast game and little room for error.

"The Sevens is a different game," explained Lauren. "It's way faster, very quick. You have to trust your teammates and have a lot of endurance because you're running all the time."

There was a lot of training involved for the team. The girls had training sessions that lasted for six hours.

On top of that, they had a conditioning coach to help keep them in top shape.

In the Summer Games, Team Ontario finished in second place after losing to Team British Columbia in the final. Team Ontario was undefeated until that final game.

They played seven games over three days in very hot conditions as Newfoundland was in the middle of a heat wave at the time.

After the games, Lauren said she and her teammates were greeted warmly by everyone in Newfoundland. As she and her friends walked the streets wearing their medals and team sweaters, local residents would stop to talk with them, congratulate them, and even have their pictures taken with team members.

Moving forward, Lauren has already been recruited by Brock University in St. Catharines and will play with the school's women's rugby team this fall.

She arrived home from Newfoundland on Aug. 13 and had a quick turnaround as she had to be in St. Catharines two days later to start training camp with the university team.

Lauren received strong support from the community, including her sponsors, Corporate Image Apparel and Promotions, Latter's Plumbing, Main Street Family Dental, and Shelburne Family Chiropractic & Wellness Centre.

Lauren summed up her experience by saying, "The Canada Games is that once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I was lucky enough to be part of it."