



FULFILLING A DREAM

FOR CANADA'S U19 NATIONAL WOMEN'S LACROSSE TEAM WINNING GOLD AT THIS YEAR'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN GERMANY IS JUST IMPORTANT AS INCREASING THE STATURE OF THE SPORT RIGHT HERE AT HOME

// By Angela Rotundo

While at first glance they seem like your typical teenage girls, this particular group boasts special talents. Most of them are still in high school, while a few of them have already started college. But put them together and what you have, is a collection of star athletes that only want to win gold as members of Canada's U19 National Women's Lacrosse Team.

2011 is a big year for the team as it is gearing for the Federation of International

Lacrosse (FIL) U19 World Championship, scheduled for August in Hanover, Germany — the first time the tournament is being held on European soil.

The team is comprised of players from Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, ranging in age from 15 to 19. Each player brings her own unique set of skills and charisma to the sport, which according to Tami Rayner, one of the team's assistant coaches, is this year's strongest advantage.



"We are a threat in every aspect of the game," says Rayner. "Our defensive unit is very strong, physically strong, and they're very quick with their feet and confident ball handlers as well. Our midfield is fast, agile and very smart, and our attackers are very creative."

Rayner is no stranger to the team as she played for the Canadian U19 team that competed at the very first World U19 Championship held in 1995. Since that time, she has played in every World Cup (1997 in Japan; 2001 in England; 2005 in Annapolis, MD; 2009 in Czech Republic), so if anyone is qualified to prepare these young girls for the experience of a lifetime, it's her.

"I've played in five world championships so it's my job to walk them through everything that I've experienced so that they're familiar with some of the emotions they're going to come across," reflects Rayner. "I think the team can expect the experience of a lifetime; lacrosse experience, personal experience, and life growth experience. I think they'll be overwhelmed by how amazing the event will be."

For the players, making the U19 team is a dream come true. Brynne Yarranton wouldn't exactly put it as overwhelmed, but she is without a doubt more than thrilled to be a part of this year's team.

"It's really exciting," she gushes. "I think it's still sinking in that I'm going to Germany to play for Team Canada and I'm just really excited."

At 15 years old, Yarranton is the youngest player on this year's Team Canada. She is known to her teammates as a talented midfielder with endless energy, and most of that energy these days comes from the excitement she feels for the upcoming championship abroad because of what it could mean for the future of Canadian lacrosse.

"I think this tournament is very important

for women's lacrosse," stresses Yarranton. "We have the potential to do really well, and if we do really well, then we'll be role models for the younger girls and that will just make lacrosse more popular, which can only be a good thing."

Fortunate enough for this young player, Yarranton has a few lacrosse veterans to help her through this once in a lifetime experience. Veteran players like Sarah Oor.

From Uxbridge, Ont., Oor is currently enrolled at Limestone College in Gaffney, N.C. Since Oor began to play lacrosse at the tender





age of 12, she has become a leader on the team both in her skill set, personality and character, but Oor believes she isn't alone in that respect.

"We've all become really good friends, and it's just a lot of talent being put together," says Oor. "There's not one girl who doesn't deserve to be on this team. Everyone has the personality, everyone has the talent, and everyone is

ready to go and compete now."

Until it's time to begin practicing for the world championship as a team, the girls are making sure they stay motivated, with the help of a little known network called Facebook. The team has created a Facebook Group to remind each other, according to Oor, to stay in shape, and to prepare themselves for the summer ahead.

Now of course, the players aren't the only ones excited and concerned about the future of Canadian lacrosse. The team's program director, Joanne Stanga, oversees the Women's National Team programs, and is involved in the team's most important goal – making sure that kids are moving through and progressing to the highest level.

According to the team's manager, Terry Rayner, the future of lacrosse is heavily dependent on tournaments like this one. The awareness that this World Championship can bring to the sport is proving to be quite effective.

"The numbers really show in registration with kids coming through," says Rayner. "The numbers are really increasing, and to come home and represent your country. It's important for those new kids interested in lacrosse."

So whether you talk to a handful of players or the organizers behind this year's U19 Women's National Team, it's clear, according to Rayner, that everyone has the same goal at heart.

"This tournament for us, to be able to come back and showcase will really increase the program for the girls and support community lacrosse." ♦

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