



Photo: José Romelo Lagman

Canada's senior women's national team took on four of the top rugby nations from August 9–22 as they played host to the 2009 Nation's Cup. Canada finished the tournament with a 1–3 win-loss record. For the full story, check out the upcoming issue of *Scrum* magazine.

Historic Win for Ontario at Canada Games

In an historic moment on August 22, Rugby Ontario's under-18 men claimed a gold medal at the 2009 Canada Summer Games with a 24–15 win over British Columbia in Charlottetown, P.E.I.

The golden victory is historic in two ways as not only is it the first time Ontario has won the top medal at the event since 1981, but it is also the last time rugby will be featured in the event until at least 2017 as it is not scheduled to appear in the next summer games.

While they didn't have a lot of spare time during their week at the games, Ontario under-18 captain Matt Kelly says his team spent their leisure moments watching and supporting other athletes and teams from the province while they competed.

As for the win over B.C., Kelly says it was "unreal" and that it was an important win for everyone involved.

"I've played for Ontario every year since I was 15....Going into this final game, we knew that we had to win and that we were going to win."

Kelly, a back-rower for Ontario, also says that knowing rugby would not be featured in the next summer games put a lot of pressure on him and his teammates to perform well in the tournament.

"It put a lot of weight, I can attest to that. I had a lot of trouble sleeping the night before we left....A really big focus going into the tournament was knowing it might be one of the last times [rugby] was in the games. We really wanted to make it special by winning a gold medal."

Both Kelly and his head coach Paul Connelly say the Canada Games experience, both on and off the field, was incredible due to the hard work and commitment by all team members.

Connelly says that because they knew the task of winning gold would be tough, the squad started training in October last year and utilized members of the Ontario Blues for scrimmage and back's skills sessions.

Ontario's performance in the tournament shows hard work pays off as they finished their pool with three wins and one tie before mauling New Brunswick 40–18 in the quarter final and belting Newfoundland 57–11 in their semi final.

Connelly, who was assisted by Michael Clayton and Chris Silverthorn, has been coaching with Rugby Ontario for 10 years and says while hundreds of players tried out for the 2009 squad, the 25 they took to the Canada Games had a special bond due to their devotion to the cause.

"It's probably the most committed group of players I've ever worked with....It really had the sense of a brotherhood, even the Canada Games personnel got that sense of how tight our team was."

- Tom Kennedy

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Ontario Women Utilize Youth for National Title

For the last two years, Ontario senior women's co-captain Nathalie Bendavid has watched the women of British Columbia claim back-to-back National Women's League championships.

This year, she and the women of Ontario put one over on B.C. with a 20-14 win in the National Women's League (NWL) final at the St. Albert Rugby Football Club in Alberta on July 10.

After securing two wins over Quebec in the regular season, Ontario then defeated Alberta 15-0 in the NWL semi-final before going on to beat B.C. — all of which Bendavid says was rewarding after playing underdog to the west for so long.

"It felt great. The last couple of years B.C.'s become quite the powerhouse.... Having such a young team this year, people just expected us to lose in the tournament again."

In the final, B.C. opened its account early with two tries but Ontario came within two points by the close of the first half.

Bendavid says Ontario's ability to snatch the lead and the win had a lot to do with its younger players who had no preconceived notions of the strength of their opposition.



Courtesy of Nathalie Bendavid

Co-captains Nathalie Bendavid and Brooke Hilditch celebrate their NWL victory.

"I think one of the things that was to our advantage was that a lot of our new players didn't know the big names they were up against so they went into the game just ready to play... that was an advantage

psychologically."

The B.C. senior squad is stacked with national talent, with eight squad members having national caps compared to Ontario's five, and Bendavid believes seeing the younger Ontario players making big tackles on prominent players such as B.C. centre Mandy Marchak gave her team a lot of belief.

Ontario has a young team with more than half the squad aged 25 or younger and while youth in senior rugby often carries negative connotations of inexperience, Bendavid says it gave her team a boost and bodes well for them in the future.

"I think the future of the team is very bright....If our younger players keep coming back, I think we'll be a force to be reckoned with in the next few years and B.C. will have to pull their socks up to beat us.

"I know that B.C.'s been a powerhouse in the past but it's nice to see that Ontario still has very good rugby."

In the inaugural NWL under-23 championship, Alberta defeated Ontario 27-14.

- Tom Kennedy

Americas Rugby Championship Action



Come cheer on the Ontario Blues this fall as they take on the Argentina Jaguars, BC Bears, Prairie Wolf Pack, The Rock and USA Select XV. Full season wrap-up will appear in the Fall 2009 issue of *Scrum* magazine.

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