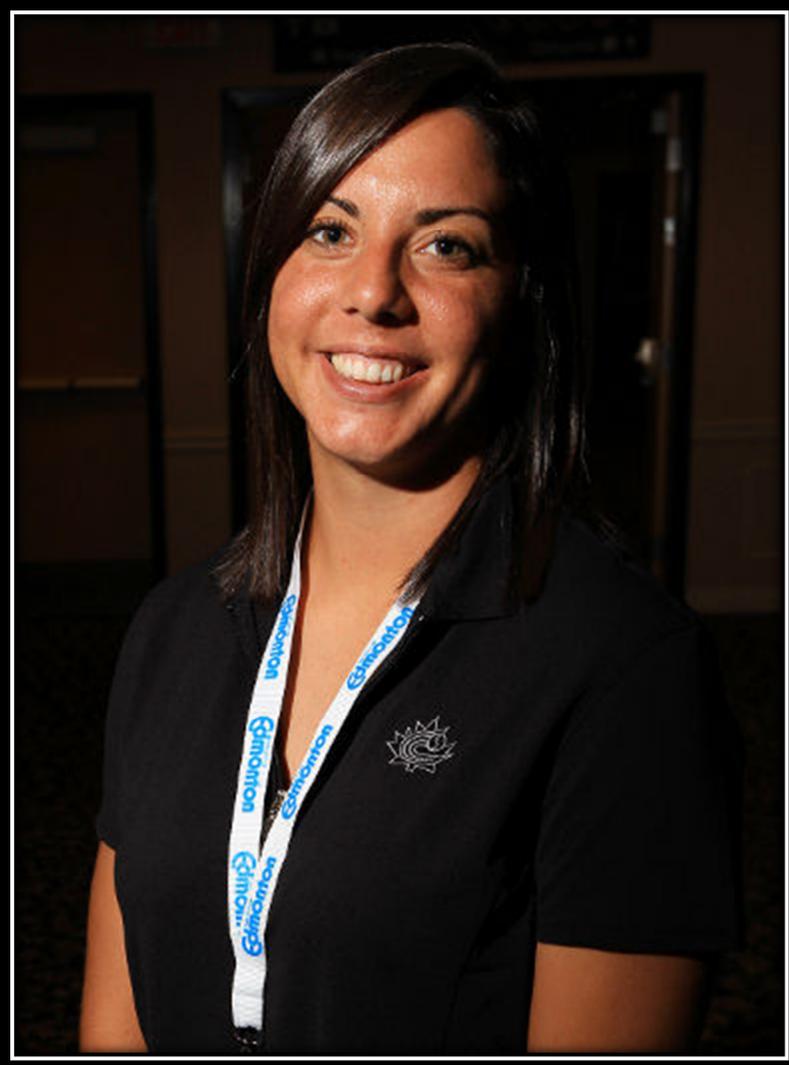


Baseball wins over Rugby

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Team Canada's Tara Sliwkanich poses for a photo following a World Cup Women's Baseball press conference at the University of Alberta, Thursday Aug. 9, 2012. Eight countries will take part in the tournament which runs August 10 to 19 at Telus Field. DAVID BLOOM EDMONTON SUN QMI AGENCY

EDMONTON - When Tara Sliwkanich stepped on to the mound at Telus Field against the Netherlands on Tuesday night, it all started to sink in.

She'd made it. She knew that her big decision three years ago was about to pay off.

As a member of both of Canada's U-20 women's rugby team and Canada's women's national baseball team, she had to make a choice. Rugby or baseball, and as her dream unfolded two nights ago, it was clear her choice to let go of the dream of one sport she loved for the other didn't go to waste.

"I love playing rugby, but baseball is my true love," said Sliwkanich, who grew up in Fort Saskatchewan and played rugby for the Alberta Pandas.

"I stepped away from rugby and threw everything I had into baseball."

She was near perfection in her debut, giving up no runs and just one hit in three innings of work, striking out four in a 19-2 win, improving Canada's record to 5-0 in round-robin play.

“I had to take a few seconds and soak it all in. It was a moment I wanted to last forever,” said Sliwkanich.

“When I heard in 2008 that Edmonton was putting in a bid, my goal was set to make that team and be on the mound in front of my friends and family.

“You work so hard for these moments and as an athlete you have no idea how many chances you’ll get. To have my first World Cup experience here in Edmonton. This is a big dream come true.”

After making the national team in 2009, she had her eyes set on making the World Cup roster in 2010 for the tournament in Venezuela, but was passed over when the final selections were made.

While some young athletes in her position may have given up, it only motivated her even more.

She worked her way back on to the roster and was selected to be part of last year’s Canada/U.S. Friendly Series in Cary, N.C., and she earned a victory in the six-game series that Canada won 4-2.

Last month, pitching for Alberta at the Senior Women Invitational tournament in Spruce Grove, she tossed her first no-hitter of her career in a 13-0 romp of B.C.

“Getting a taste and then not being able to go in 2010, it made me want it even more, and I trained extremely hard,” said Sliwkanich.

“Being a part of this team has been the biggest highlight in my career.”

Growing up in the Sliwkanich household, you couldn’t help but have a love for sports. Tara’s father ,Terry, is a sports enthusiast. Her two brothers both took up baseball and her sister was a standout rugby player.

Tara takes the term multi-sport athlete and blows it out of the water. As a young kid, she played baseball, softball, rugby, basketball and hockey at an elite level.

Her father is the assistant principal at Fort High school and he played a big role in her life, coaching her in baseball, basketball and rugby.

“My dad passed on his athleticism and his love for sports in general to all of us kids,” said Sliwkanich.

“There hasn’t been a tournament that I’ve taken part in that my family hasn’t been there.

“When I saw my family and my supporters up there in the stands... this is my time now to pay them back for everything they’ve done for me.”

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