

Lawrence helps Canada to World Cup qualification



Written By JAKE COURTEPATTE

When the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup opens in Paris next June, Caledon native Ashley Lawrence will feel right at home. The 23-year old, who saw her soccer star rise as a member of the bronze medal-winning Team Canada at the 2016 Rio Olympics, helped the Canadian senior team to World Cup qualification at the CONCACAF World Cup qualification tournament this past week. Despite looking forward to training on her home country's turf prior to the world's largest tournament, the Paris Saint Germain Feminines member will get a sense of comfort competing in France.

"Any time you get an opportunity to play in the World Cup, that's incredible," Lawrence said in a press conference prior to the qualification tournament. "France is a wonderful country, it's a football culture. You just feel the love of the game, not only on the men's side but on the women's side as well. Every day we're working toward the World Cup, but we take it one day at a time. Right now, our focus is the CONCACAF tournament and qualifying for the World Cup. We never lose sight of the long-term goal, which is qualifying and eventually becoming the number one team in the world."

The fifth-ranked Canadians are certainly on their way there. They conceded only one goal in the round robin stage, taking down Costa Rica, Jamaica and Cuba.

"It was just about going out there and playing the game we knew how to play," said Lawrence.

It was Lawrence that set the play in motion to open the scoring Monday night in a 7-0 win over Panama in the tournament semifinals, a game that clinched a spot for Canada in the Women's World Cup next year, their seventh straight tournament. A throw-in from Lawrence in the 44th-minute to teammate Janine Beckie was crossed to longtime captain Christine Sinclair in the box, who headed it in and opened the floodgates.

Paired with longtime national teammate Kadeisha Buchanan on the defensive end, Lawrence said she relishes every opportunity she gets to play alongside some of her idols, like the highly-decorated Sinclair.

"Anytime I get a chance to get out there with this team, it's amazing," said Lawrence, a graduate of Mayfield Secondary School. With the top three teams in the CONCACAF tournament earning qualification, the defending champion United States are also already in, who Team Canada will meet in the finals later this week.

Qualifiers in the last seven World Cup tournaments, Canada's best-ever finish was a bronze medal in 2003.