

19-year-old Canadian triathlete wins unofficial NCAA title

By **Robert Belardi**

It's been quite the wild ride for Kleinburg native Kira Gupta-Baltazar.

The University of San Francisco student finished in first place overall and helped lead her triathlon team to second place in Tempe, Arizona last Saturday.

This was the 19-year-old's third triathlon competition in just over a two-week span.

Gupta-Baltazar came in first in the competition held in St. George, Utah, before travelling over to Quarteira, Portugal for the World junior Championships. She finished in 17 place and left as the top ranked Canadian.

Upon her return and accomplishing such an incredible result, Gupta-Baltazar said this was an exciting moment for her and her team.

"It was very emotional. It had been a crazy two weeks and emotions are running really high. It was an exciting moment for me and my team," Gupta-Baltazar said.

Classified as an emerging sport under the NCAA, Gupta-Baltazar said triathlon has until 2024 to be registered as an official sport. It will need 40 schools to be registered with teams across the USA and the sport is so close to reaching that number.

"I think it's such a great opportunity, especially for women, because we don't have as many opportunities as men to continue sport past a high school level. I think it's been a great pathway for women to continue into collegiate sports. It's had a great following so far and I think it will go through," Gupta-Baltazar explained.

Growing up, Gupta-Baltazar spent most of her summers with her uncle in Inglewood. She loved swimming and playing soccer. But triathlon caught her attention because it was more interesting than the other two. She loved the fact it was three sports in one and nothing was repetitive.

She joined C3, and when she was just seven years old, she won her first C3 Caledon Kids of Steel Triathlon.

Throughout her journey, there is one coach in particular she would like to thank for where she is today.

"There's a coach at C3 that I would really like to thank and he lives in Caledon as well. His wife passed away in a car accident a couple of years ago and he is an instrumental factor into where I am right now. He is one of the main reasons I am where I am because he took so much time out of his life for me. He's so passionate. I want to shout out Luis Lopez. Thank you so much for everything you have done for me," Gupta-Baltazar said.

With teachings from Lopez, Gupta-Baltazar tries not to take things too seriously. She tries to have the most fun she can when in a competition. Elite sports are very demanding but the perfect formula for her is to keep having a love for the sport and enjoy every moment of it.

Having been training with former Olympic coach Barrie Shepley for the past four years, Gupta-Baltazar has her sights set on the Olympics in 2024.

With all of the competitions done for now, the medicine program student will return home to write her exams online.

In the offseason, having finished her final year under junior level competitions (16-19), she will prepare for a U23 Olympic level

distance competition in Florida in March.

?All of C3 is so incredible proud of Kira, and her coaches, family and team mates for this incredible accomplishment? said Barrie Shepley.