

Caledon's Lawrence, Canada set sights on World Cup

Written By JAKE COURTEPATE

It was at the 2015 Women's World Cup, played on her own Canadian soil, that Ashley Lawrence first made a name for herself on the international stage.

A member of the Canadian senior squad for just under two years, the then 19-year old notched her first goal for the red and white, in a group stage game against the Netherlands.

It was a disappointing end for the home squad, eventually falling in the quarterfinals to England with Canada hosting the enormous event for the first time.

But this time, with the World Cup once again set to kick off this weekend in France, the fullback from Caledon likes her team's chances.

"We've been waiting for a moment like this for a long time," Lawrence told the Canadian Press following a practice with the squad late last week. "We're a young team, but we're experienced, a lot of us were here in 2015—we've definitely got what it takes to compete with any team on the world stage."

Lawrence's views are far from a hot take: Canada's last loss on the international stage came in the CONCACAF final in 2018, falling 2-0 to the United States. Since then, the red and white have gone 5-0-4 in 2019, led by the like of rising stars Lawrence and Kadeisha Buchanan, as well as the legendary Christine Sinclair.

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 in mid-October of 2018. She was one of several red and white teammates to represent Canada at the group draw shortly after.

She told the Canadian Press it is her time wearing the maple leaf that has brought her to the level of leadership, athleticism, and humility few athletes have accomplished.

"I try to bring my experience from the national team," she said. "Whether it's on the field, off the field, just being that voice and adding that energy? I really learned that with Canada."

Since 2017, Lawrence has taken on a leadership role with Team Canada: her 720 minutes on the field in 2019 surpasses all other teammates, as well as her 1,710 minutes over the past two years.

Canada enters the tournament as the favourites to win Group E, chosen from the lottery to compete amongst Cameroon, New Zealand, and The Netherlands, with the top two teams automatically gaining entrance to the knockout stage. The squad is currently ranked fifth overall in the world rankings.

Yet despite their standing, coach Kenneth Heiner-Moller said his team will take the tournament "one step at a time."

"We are going there to win it, but we have been very good at taking things one step at a time," he said in a statement. "We didn't look beyond the Algarve Cup and we didn't look beyond warmup matches against England or Spain. We only looked at what was right in front of us."

"Right now, there are three group matches in front of us and we are focused very clearly on Cameroon, New Zealand and Netherlands."

Lawrence and her squad open their schedule on Monday in a match against Cameroon.