

Moms celebrate Canada's soccer Olympic Gold at James Dick Quarry

By Rob Paul

There are few things in life more impressive than bringing home a gold medal at the Olympics.

Canada brought home seven of them at the 2021 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, after the games were delayed by a year due to COVID.

Despite the Olympics going forward in late July and concluding August 8, the pandemic didn't leave them untouched. There were no fans, which meant families and loved ones were unable to be there when those who mean the most to them immortalized themselves in sports history.

One of the most memorable moments of the Olympics was when the Canadian women's soccer team shocked the world and brought home the gold medal.

Not only did they upset the U.S. 1-0 in the semi-finals, but they beat Sweden in penalty kicks to finish off the Cinderella story?Canada was a longshot to win gold at +2000.

Knowing how big this moment would be, Caledon's Barrie Shepley wanted to make it special, but he didn't realize how big his little idea would become.

Shepley?co-owner of Personal Best Health and Performance in Caledon and head coach for the Canadian Cross Training Club, located at James Dick Quarry?is a decorated triathlon coach with Olympic experience himself, having been a coach for Canada in the 2000 Sydney Olympics when the men brought home gold.

When Shepley reached out to Tina Lawrence?mother of Canadian women's soccer team member Ashley Lawrence?about watching the gold medal match on the beach at James Dick Quarry, it snowballed into an event nobody will soon forget.

?It's one of those evolutionary things,? he said. ?Ashley Lawrence, who is a Caledon superstar soccer player from Mayfield, we've known each other now for probably eight or

nine years. She's been involved with some of our functions and has come to paddle at the quarry, and her mum and brother are members. As a supporter of Caledon-based athletes who don't always get the recognition they deserve, I've always felt the need to reach out and get Canadian athletes from Caledon more recognition.

?When Tina couldn't go to Tokyo, I could feel the empathy of all these parents who wouldn't get to be part of the journey with their daughters the same way they might have been able to in Rio. So, I wanted to do something as a club to help celebrate the women and as I watched the team knock off team after team, they made it into the medal round. That's when Tina told me how nervous she was, and I asked her where she was going to view it and it was going to be her and some family in the basement. Well, we have a big screen TV at the quarry with streaming possibilities. We'd already been streaming various events throughout the Olympics to show our members what excellence looks like. So, I told her to bring her house party to the quarry and my coaches and athletes know Ashley so we could all grab some lawn chairs and watch together.?

It started out with Ashley Lawrence's family, but when the game was moved, it led to both Nichelle Prince's family and Kadeisha Buchanan's family joining the party.

?The game was originally supposed to be Thursday night, so we were going to have about 10 of us on the beach to watch it,? said Shepley. ?Then with T-minus 12 hours it got pushed from midnight until the next morning. And a couple of the other moms called

Tina to ask what she was doing. She asked me if the Buchanan and Prince family and their groups could come and the answer was, of course, yes. Then the Brampton soccer club came out to watch?which many of the girls played for at some point.

?So, by the time we got to the big match, there were 150 people at the beach socially distanced. Tim Horton's was even great enough to get involved and supply some good nutrition. Late on the Thursday night I even got in-touch with a colleague from the CBC (Shepley is a triathlon analyst for CBC) about getting a live camera to come out because they could win this whole thing for the first time ever with three of the moms all watching together. That really grew it.?

Not being able to be with their daughters when they won gold wasn't ideal, but Shepley's goal was to ensure they still have the crowd and support around them when their daughter's made history.

?All of the moms would have preferred to be in Tokyo watching their daughter's win their historic gold medal, but with the pandemic, C3 decided to try to host them for a fun, inspiring day and we were very lucky we ended up getting a perfect day,? he said. ?Even some of the young girls brought roses for the moms. There were so many young women watching and I kidded that they'll be the age to represent Canada by the time the Olympics roll around in 2032 for Brisbane. You can't ever underestimate the power of young athletes experiencing that kind of moment and joy. The intention now is to have the women back to have a gold medal party with the medals.?

The moment was perfect by Shepley's estimation, Canadian history was made in the most dramatic fashion and will leave its mark on everybody who was at the beach that day.

?We felt very blessed to watch history being made in the way that we did,? said Shepley. ?In my estimation that is one of those Joe Carter home run in '93 or Sydney Crosby's overtime goal moments or Kawhi Leonard's Game 7 shot with half a second. It's not often one thing ends an entire tournament for a gold. It's one of those things we'll look back on 30 years from now and every single person on that beach will not have to think of where they were when history was made by these young women.

?It was a wonderful day to have everyone there and getting to see the families experience this. Everyone was six feet off the ground. My wife had predicted that the women would win in penalty kicks, and I didn't quite believe her and then when we got down to the second last penalty kick and we missed, it looked a little grim. But those kinds of magical moments you remember for a reason because they come down to one strike of a ball or one hit of a bat. The three moms were squeezing their hands so hard because a ball in was a win and a ball missed could be a loss.?

The way the day and the moment played out is like something from a fairytale, but Shepley says there's plenty of reasons it went on without a hitch and credits many of Caledon's own residents and businesses for their contributions.

?You can plan these things for 17 years and it pours rain, and nobody comes, and this was basically 36 hours from the inception to having a perfect day and a gold medal with crazy energy on the beach,? he said. ?None of this happens without support. C3 want to thank Tony Sena and his Bolton Bell Store, Tim Horton's, James Dick, Benson Steel, Royal Containers, Nuvo Iron and Kinetico for helping make a memorable day for the Olympic moms. The moms were blown away because they anticipated watching at home and then this all came together, and they got to experience all the energy on the beach. Then the pinnacle being their daughters getting the job done under tremendous stress.?

Not only did the women win a gold for Canada, but Lawrence also won one for the Town of Caledon. Shepley thinks the impact that will have on future athletes in Caledon is immeasurable.

?This whole thing was happening on a little beach in Caledon. I was getting calls from across the country from former Caledon people who were watching too,? he said. ?Watching and knowing Ashley had grown up in Caledon and played soccer here and her mom still lives here was special. It's really important to me as a coach for young athletes to see someone who eats at the Freshii in Bolton can be at the Olympic Games and win a gold. For kids in Caledon to see a kid who went to Mayfield High School have a gold medal forever is special.?