

Campbell's "A" team savours silver medal

By Doyle Fox, The Leader-Post September 24, 2013

<http://www.leaderpost.com/Campbell+team+savours+silver+medal/8950718/story.html>



Amy Yule (left to right), Alex Massier, Auriel Bill and Abi Fries, four Grade 12 students from Campbell Collegiate, helped Canada finish second in water polo at the Youth Pan American Games in Argentina.

Photograph by: TROY FLEECE, Regina Leader-Post

In the sport of water polo, the Union Americana de Natacion Youth Pan America Championships represent the pinnacle of young athletes' junior careers.

It was made even more special for four girls who brought silver medals home to Saskatchewan.

Abi Fries, Amy Yule and Alex Massier of Regina, as well as Auriel Bill of Estevan, were part of the Canadian team that fell 10-6 in a hard-fought gold-medal game against the United States in Buenos Aires, Argentina on Aug. 31.

"U.S.A. has the reputation for being the best, but for us to make them sweat was definitely a good feeling," Massier, who plays the position of hole check, said about the gold-medal game.

"We started off strong and did all the stuff we wanted and we were really close with them," added Yule, who plays hole set. "We were working towards that the whole time, so it was great to be there in the final."

The Canadian girls were ranked second after posting a 4-1 round-robin record, and rode that momentum to a 9-3 victory over Brazil in a semifinal.

"As a team, we made sure to pump each other up," said Bill, a driver. "The whole team really came together in those moments, especially when we needed to use our mental abilities more than our physical ones."

The physicality of the sport was something that appealed to all four of the girls, who have played water polo for at least six years.

Yule, Massier and Fries have spent most of their careers playing on the same teams. Bill has been playing with the others for two years. She lives with Yule's family in Regina while she attends Campbell Collegiate with the other three.

"We've been such a tightknit group since we came together," Massier said. "We push each other so much further and I think that's why we succeeded."

The girls were being scouted by the national team throughout 2013 and were invited to train in Montreal before playing exhibition games in early May in Holland. Following those exhibition games, they found out they were all selected to the team.

The news was especially thrilling for Massier.

"I was over-the-top excited, because last year I didn't make it, so to know I made it the year that was really important," she said. "It meant the world to me."

To prepare for the Pan Am event, the girls played a couple of "intense" and "physical" exhibition games against teams from Australia, which is when Fries believes the team really came together and clicked.

"So we bonded over that - fighting with Australians," Fries, who plays driver, recalled with a chuckle. All four of the girls are in Grade 12 this year and their futures in water polo are still up in the air but, for now, they can revel in the memories they attained from the 50 international games they played in 2013.

"It's great to know that we've accomplished so much all together for so many years," Yule said. "It's so sad that we will all be leaving next year." "It was probably one of the best experiences in my life," Bill added. "It was really cool to do something different and out of our comfort zone. It was awesome to share that with the team because you just meet these new people, you don't really know much about them and then at the end of the summer, you are best friends."

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