



# Renegades Newsletter

**Dec. 5**



This week, a chat with Emily Csikos, who was so kind to take some time to talk about water polo on the big stage, be it representing Canada, or playing for the University of California at Berkeley, or coming home to wear the uniform of the Calgary Renegades.

Trying to keep Emily's bio short isn't exactly easy, but here's the condensed version of an awfully impressive life in water polo:

- Helped lead Canada to the finals of the 2009 FINA World Championship with a team-high 15 goals in seven matches
- Helped the Canadian senior national team to a silver medal at the 2007 and 2011 Pan-American Games
- Competed with the Canadian Junior National Team from 2004-06
- MVP at the 2005 Youth Pan-American Games
- Alberta Female Athlete of the Year in 2006

#### NCAA:

- A 2010 first-team All-American and 2009 honourable mention All-American as a freshman
- Led Cal's 2010 squad with 69 goals
- 65 goals as a freshman, second on the school's all-time freshman scoring list
- Has 134 career goals, sixth-most career goals in school history

### **Back to beginning, tell us how you got started in water polo.**

I started summer swimming with the Tritons, like a lot of the kids do. And I started with the Renegades when I was really young. Both of my sisters played with me, Julie and Kira. My dad actually started a sports school with me and a bunch of girls my age and it was basketball, volleyball, soccer and water polo. We did that for three years and the last year we just did water polo. And I played with them and I actually played against the Renegades as a bantam. And then I joined the Renegades and I kept going through the youth national team, junior national team and then the national team.

### **When did you know water polo was your sport?**

I remember I slowly dropped off from soccer and swimming and basketball and I still played volleyball in school. And then I made the youth national team and you got to go on these amazing trips to Germany and Cuba and wherever in the world. That was pretty



exciting. And then I made the junior national team and I moved to Montreal for a summer. At one time I wasn't so sure I wanted to keep playing anymore and I didn't know if I liked it, but I would give it one more chance - this was six, seven years ago. And I went back to Montreal and I made the national team within a summer. I think maybe

that summer was when I realized what the payoffs were, what a hard sport it is and that I just loved it.

### **Were you a good swimmer?**

Not really. Swimming is boring. You're just staring up that one lane for hours on end.

### **What's your favourite Renegades moment?**

I love being a Renegade and I'm so happy to be from that club. My favourite moment or moments is the Alberta Open. That's my favourite tournament ever. There was one Alberta Open that was just absolutely crazy. My dad was the coach and we were youth girls and we were really good. And the ref made some call and my dad was screaming at him, really screaming at him and they gave him the red card and kicked him out. And

then my sister, who was in her first year or so as our assistant coach, and she looked like a deer caught in the headlights; she wasn't really sure what to do. There were these more experienced coaches behind her telling her how to coach.



And then after our game we went to the boys' game and Chris Hammer was coaching boys at that time. And they were in such a close game and what I remember was so amazing to us was Chris just started throwing players in the water to get penalty shots cause you're not allowed to illegally enter the water and that was the only way we could get the ball back. And they gave the other team a penalty shot and we stopped it and tied the game. He must have thrown four guys in the water to force penalty shots and get a chance to win. And he threw a chair in the water. I'm not

sure why he did that, but it was pretty cool. And I remember how crazy the Alberta Open can be.

### **What does being a Renegade mean to you?**

I'm at home being a Renegade. It's where I grew up, it's where I learned water polo. You can even see it on the national team, my roots are just so different from a lot of the other girls. I feel the style the Renegades play has helped me on the national team and in life.

### **Do you have a role model?**

I've never had just one role model in my life. I continuously look up to my own teammates. Ellen Rafferty; her outlook on water polo is just phenomenal. So I've looked up to her for that and if I was ever feeling down, I would think about her and what she taught me. I had other good friends growing up who were amazingly good swimmers and I wanted to be more like them in the water. And when I first went to Montreal there was Alison (Braden) Hammer; she had experience and I didn't and I would go to her for advice. And she was great in that way.

Of course there's my parents. They have had the greatest influence on me as a person and a water polo player, and without them and their support, I would have never made it as far as I have.

### **Is there one thing you wish you could add to your game, one thing you wish you could do better?**

Just one? I have a long list of things I need to get better at. Well, I'd like to be taller. Swimming faster would be nice, but if there was one thing I could be better at, I'd like to be able to help my team be more consistent.

### **What about playing NCAA water polo in California?**

It wasn't the water polo that was tough for me, it was the amount of swimming we had to do and in the first semester you can't even touch a water polo ball and that was just awful. It was a bit of a shock. And the number of games you play in one year is huge, we played 40 games in our semester before we even went to our major tournaments. I was definitely ready for a change and I was ready for the water polo. I really believe most, if not all, Renegade girls would be up to doing it. It's great because you're not only thinking about water polo, you're not only thinking about school, there are so many things to do. And instead of having to leave early for practice, you just walk five minutes and you're at the pool. No driving, no snow, no problems!

I'm really glad I went to northern California and not southern California. Berkely is a lot like B.C. and I kinda like that. There was a bit of a culture shock when I got there, when you realize that everything you see in the movies with college fraternities and sororities is actually true. I don't see myself settling into California, but it's great place to be for a while.

**Lets talk about the Pan-Am games. It's amazing how many people are talking about "the game" as some people are calling it. Have you ever been in a wilder game?**

I really don't think so. I mean one time my team actually broke the record for the longest NCAA game. We did the double overtime and then we went into six sudden-death overtime periods. But that wasn't quite the same as overtime and then something like 24 minutes of shootouts with a Pan-Am Games gold medal on the line. It was really something, even if we lost.

**Do you like shootouts?**

I personally like shootouts, but that's just because I like the atmosphere that it brings along with it. But I do agree with the people who think shootouts might not be the fairest way to get a winner. After how long that game (Pan-Am final) was and how much preparation we put into it, you can't help thinking that it's a little bit ridiculous that a game as important as that could be determined on one missed penalty shot.



**As a shooter, do you like that pressure sitting squarely on your shoulders?**

I'm a much better player under pressure than not. If you look into my stats, the games where we win by 10, 15 goals, I might have a goal. But I'm much better in the games that are really close. I don't know what it is, it might be the adrenaline, the feeling that I need to raise my game for my team to win, but I really like that challenge and I think I respond well.

**What's the feeling on the women's national team after losing that game. It would have simplified things from the Olympics perspective if you had won. What are the girls saying now?**

Everyone wanted to win that game. We really put our hearts into it and we thought we had it. So, it wasn't a good feeling afterwards. But nobody was pointing fingers. It was a complete team loss and our coaches said the exact same thing. We focussed on a defence we had never used before and pulled it out for that game and stuck to it and we played together. Although you can't help but be upset about that game, we proved to ourselves that we can do it. My dad said that was the best women's water polo game he has ever seen in his life. And to know that we can compete in that calibre of a game means that we should be able to do anything. We fully intend on going to the Olympics next summer. We're taking all the positives from it and moving on. We'll be fine.

### **What is required to get to London now?**

We need to place in the top four in a qualifying tournament in the spring. I believe it's in Trieste in the middle of April. The only teams that won't be there are England, Australia, the U.S. and China. It won't be easy, but we all know we can do it. We missed our chance to be in Athens in 2008, so we are just much more determined to make it to London

### **Missing out on the Olympics in 2008, how hard was that?**

That was probably one of the hardest things I have ever experienced. When you put your heart and soul into something and you come up short. I was young, I was only 19, but it was incredibly hard for me. I also probably didn't fully understand the full extent of what had just happened in the same way that some of the older women on the team did.

### **Tell us about the kind of commitment it takes to dedicate yourself to playing the sport at this level.**

Anybody who plays or watches the game knows how hard it is and what it demands of you. But some people hear you are training for the Olympics and say, 'Oh that's cool, that must be fun.' Sure, it's cool and it is fun, but it's exhausting. And it's exactly what I want to be doing at this moment in my life. There are times and days when you kind of wonder what you are doing and why you are here and you remind yourself about the goals you have set and the girls who share them. And one of the girls will send out a picture of what the Olympic medals look like, and we all smile just a little bit and find ways to keep working. But when it's six o'clock in the morning and it just snowed three feet in Montreal, it's a struggle sometimes.

### **What was it like the first time you wore the maple leaf on your swimsuit?**

You just get a huge feeling of pride. You're playing for your country. Can it really get any better than that? You're at the Pan-Ams and you see other athletes in their Canadian gear and you get this feeling that you share something special with them. You get this realization 'I'm competing for Canada.' This is the best team my country can send and I get to be a part of it. And I get to stand up here with them. There's this maple leaf on your suit and it represents all the work you and so many other people put in to give you a chance to be there. It's excitement and pride and you don't want to let anyone down. There's really a special feeling at that time, for sure.

But when I get to stand with the Renegades, maybe because I don't get to do it that much anymore, I really just feel comfortable, I'm getting to stand with my club and it will always mean the world to me. Those feelings are just amazing, there'll all different in their own way. Coming back to the Renegades is special, they made me who I am. It's home. It's something truly special.