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Irwin eyes women's Olympic hockey berth



CALGARY – While the main focus at the Canadian Olympic hockey orientation camp in Calgary was on the men, the country's national women's program was also involved as they busily prepare for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver.

One of those hopefuls vying for a spot on the final Olympic women's hockey roster is Haley Irwin of

Thunder Bay.

Taking a year off of school from the University of Minnesota-Duluth to

Thunder Bay's Haley Irwin (left) deflects a puck past the goaltender in a drill at a Canadian national women's team practice held at the Pengrowth Saddledome during the men's Olympic hockey orientation camp in Calgary. Photo: Bruce Rakoczy

join the women's centralized group of 26 players, which is based in Calgary, the bubbly and personable Irwin is basking in the experience.

"Yeah it has been great so far. It has been very busy, very intense with long days, but it's awesome. I'm having a great experience and I'm having a blast."



With the roster still to be paired down Irwin suggests that everyone involved remains positive.

"I think the atmosphere has been great. We've all been getting along and everyone seems to be clicking. I think that even though there are cuts to be made we have kind of put that on the back burner.

Right now we're at 26 and we're a team of 26. The cuts aren't something we can't focus on. When they happen they happen."

Irwin already boasts such laurels as an NCAA women's hockey championship in 2008 at UMD where she is majoring in Community Health.

Also on her resume is Western Collegiate Hockey Association first-team all star honours, being the league rookie-of-the-year and WCHA scoring champion in the same season.

The former Thunder Bay Queens standout feels she has many of the same qualities to offer the women's Olympic team, if she is indeed chosen to play?

"You know I like to think I bring that physical part of the game. You know the battling in front along with the defensive part of the game and finishing in front of the net."

Haley Irwin answers questions at a media scrum following practice at the Saddledome. Photo: Bruce Rakoczy

The talented forward also feels her two-year run with Canada's national under-22 squad has benefitted her immensely.

"It was a stepping stone for me. The under-22 program is great and it helped me get my foot in the door and make the jump up to the senior team."

That U-22 opportunity gave the 21-year old Irwin her chance to don the Canadian jersey internationally. It has been a dream fulfilled getting to skate for her country and is something she finds difficult to bring to words.



Photos: Bruce Rakoczy

"It's kind of an unexplainable feeling to be honest. It's one of those feelings you dream about when you're a little girl," Irwin tried to explain. "When you finally do get the opportunity to wear the jersey it's something that never gets old no matter how many times you put it on. The feeling is...You're just so proud to be Canadian."

Team Canada women's head coach Melody Davidson is one of those who is pleased with Irwin's efforts to date.

"Haley's one of our young guns that has come up through our under-22 program," said Canada's women's bench boss.

"She's progressed tremendously. There is some skill there and she is very responsible without the puck."

Asked to put into words her feelings of what it would be like playing for Canada at the 2010 games in Vancouver the effervescent Irwin remained highly confident.

"I don't know what the feeling would be like, but I can imagine it. I imagine many different emotions. That's still a dream, but I'm here to make it a reality. That's what I'm focused on. We'll take it day-by-day."

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