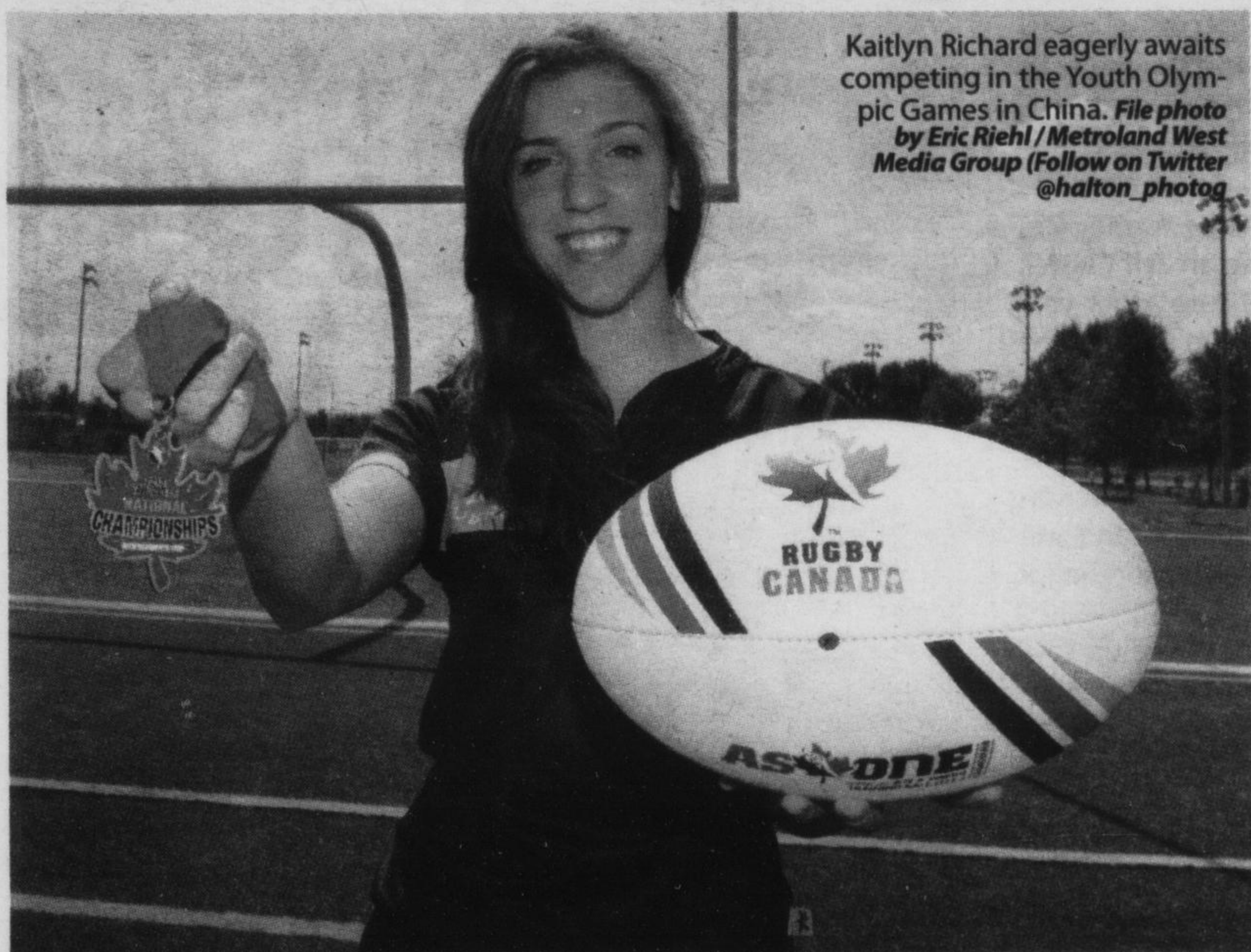


International stage awaits local rugby standout



Kaitlyn Richard eagerly awaits competing in the Youth Olympic Games in China. File photo by Eric Riehl / Metroland West Media Group (Follow on Twitter @halton_photos)

Richard thrilled to be named to U18 national sevens squad for Youth Olympic Games in China

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The second and final round of national team tryouts was underway and just four more cuts were left to be made.

That's when things really got nerve-wracking. "Actually, it was more scary at that point than during the first camp," recalled local rugby standout Kaitlyn Richard of two recent trips to Seguin, B.C. "Once you get to that stage it's about the little mistakes, not the big ones... things you do when (seemingly) nobody's looking. You've got to be on top of the ball all the time."

Showcasing the two-way prowess that landed her a spot on the provincial squad last summer, the quick-footed 18-year-old Miltonian survived the final roster trimming to clinch a spot on Canada's U18 women's sevens team that'll be headed to Nanjing, China for the Youth Olympic Games in mid-August.

The 12-player squad was announced last week.

Said an excited Richard, "It's absolutely incredible. To have the opportunity to go to China and represent Canada with so many talented players... it's a lot to take in."

Members of this year's squad have been identified as having potential to be part of the Olympic team in 2020.

Remarked Women's Olympic Sevens head coach John Tait, "Kaitlyn has good size and decent speed with real potential to improve further with some dedicated training. She showed some good uptake on some of the positional and technical skills we have coached her. Hopefully with some continued support and diligence on her part she can play an important part in this team's success and potentially someday as a senior player in our Olympic program."

Pointing to a strict Olympic weight lifting regimen adopted since last year's U18 nationals in Vancouver — where she scored an insurance try (her third of tournament) in Ontario's 25-5 gold-medal win over host B.C. — Richard feels she's added sufficient strength to her natural speed.

Both will be especially vital under the time-shortened, wide-open environment of sevens play.

"There's nobody beside you out there (in sevens), so you've got to make your tackles or be able to power through hits," noted Richard, who despite initial reservations about playing rugby — due to her then diminutive stature — has shown rapid development since her start in Grade 9 at Bishop Reding Secondary School. "I prefer it (sevens) — the faster, shorter game. You definitely can't afford to be just a one-sided player."

Richard is also embracing the pressure beset on the Canadian squad, that heads overseas with high expectations after qualifying with a second-place finish at last year's Sevens World Cup in Russia. This makes Canada the highest-qualifying team within the North American Caribbean Rugby Association.

"Being around the senior women's team players (in B.C.) was incredible. They've built such a legacy as a force to be reckoned with," said Richard, who adds that she's definitely vying for a spot in the starting lineup and figures she'll be used on the wing or in a set-up role. She'll be joined by another Halton-area player, Maddy Seattle of Oakville. "I think the pressure motivates me, and I'm hoping to make everyone proud. We're (Canada) not just going there to compete; we're going there to come away with it all."

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Tornados thriving on triathlon scene

Still in their first year of existence, Milton's Tornado Triathlon Club has wasted no time making its presence felt on the youth/adult racing circuit.

Continuing a strong early-season campaign, the team enjoyed strong showings at a pair of recent events — most notably at the Caledon Kids of Steel.

Leading the way with a golden performance was Will Kubas, whose 20:01 performance (200m swim, 5km bike, 2km run) put him atop the 10-and-11-year-old division.

Older sister Ella Kubas was second among all girls in her age group and sixth overall in the 14-and-15-year-old division with a 40:47 effort in the 500m swim, 10km bike, 4km run.

TORNADO

Matching those placings in the six-and-seven-year-old ranks was Kyla Ross-Skinner, who completed the 50m swim 1.5km bike, 500m run

course in 10:26.

Also cracking the top-10 in her age group (eight-and-nine-year-old) and placing third among the girls was Annika Theben, who clocked in at 17:05 in the 100m swim, 3km bike, 1km run.

On the same weekend, the Tornados competed at the Guelph Lake Kids of Steel Youth Cup Series. Ella Kubas was the top finisher, placing 16th overall and third among the girls, while age group-mate Helene Theben was seventh among the girls and 21st overall. Annika Theben was the top mountain biker.

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