

SPORTS

# Lofthouse finds home on provincial rugby squad

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Jesse Lofthouse isn't one to back down from a challenge. Especially when it comes to rugby.

Earlier this year, the 21-year-old Stouffville resident elected to audition with the provincial senior men's team for the first time.

Vieing for a spot with 50 others, Lofthouse received the word last week one day after the final practice with an intrasquad match in Oshawa, he was one of six new faces who made this year's 30-member team known as the Ontario Blues.

Mission accomplished for the fullback with the Markham Irish Rugby Football Club men's first team

"It was definitely a hard team to make," said Lofthouse, who played on some of Stouffville District Secondary School's title teams. "I've

played on the under-17s, under-18 and under-19 provincial teams in the past but this one was the biggest challenge."

"When I was with the under-17, 18 and 19s you were playing with one specific age group. But at the men's tryouts it was different. It was kind of like playing boys against men. It was a bit intimidating."

But Lofthouse was on the coaches' radar, thanks to playing with those age-group teams.

It also didn't hurt that two of Lofthouse's coaches with the Irish club, Mark Winokur and Rodin Lozada, were on the men's team staff and knew how he could perform under pressure.

"They told me before the final practice that I would probably make the team," he said. "But I still went out there during the final intra squad match and played as



**JESSE LOFTHOUSE:** Stouffville Secondary grad playing in nationals this weekend in Burlington.

hard as I could." Lofthouse and his team are

playing in the Canadian Rugby Championship campaign in Burlington starting today.

The Blues will be a target of the rival teams, being the two-time defending CRC champions.

"We're all hoping to set a standard of working real hard to retain the title," he said.

Originally a fly half at Stouffville Secondary and Seneca College, Lofthouse was converted to the fullback with the Irish.

Lofthouse was quick to credit several people, including his brother, Jordan, who played with him in high school and club ball.

"Jordan always pushed me to get better, growing up everything I learned was from him," Lofthouse said.

As well, there was the coaching he received from individuals such as Jamie Hewitt at Stouffville Sec-

ondary and current club coaches.

Other high points include winning national gold with an under-18 provincial team and two Ontario Federation of School Athletic Association silver medals at Stouffville.

He's not done.

"That is as long as my body lets me," he said. "I'm 21 years old now and I'm still pretty young. Ideally, I'd like to play for a while yet."

Having played within the provincial system, a natural progression might be to take the next step and compete at the national level.

In the past, Lofthouse entertained such thoughts. But since that time, those dreams have faded away, he confessed.

"Right now I'll just go out and try to work hard and get better as a player," he said.

And keep on accepting challenges as they come his way.

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