

Every young athlete dreams of becoming professional in their particular sport. For a few this dream becomes a reality through time, discipline and leadership. Melissa Tancredi is one of those lucky athletes whom made it to the top. She did not grow up playing soccer, but instead competed in track and field, javelin and volleyball. Throughout these activities Melissa gained a variety of skills such as speed, endurance, teamwork and proprioceptive abilities. She soon switched to soccer as she grew up and began high school.¹ From humble beginnings growing up in Ancaster, she developed her skills throughout her childhood and through the high school years, making her way to playing college soccer. From here the story goes to the scouts' interest at her games, and working to achieve their approval for the big leagues.

²The journey to making her way to playing university soccer, at the University of Notre Dame, began painfully as an anterior cruciate ligament injury in her knee kept her benched for her first year in college. Over the next four years in university she found successes within the sport, achieving some incredible accomplishments for being the 'rookie' on the field. In her second year of university she set a school record for Notre Dame, scoring a goal within the first 30 seconds of the game, earning her a starting position for the Irish team.

³In Tancredi's third year, she was transitioned from striking to defending against her own position. In her instance, this was a spectacular upgrade which led to many

¹ <http://www.karinaleblanc.com/?p=25>

² http://www.und.com/sports/w-soccer/mtt/tancredi_melissa00.html

³ Ibid.

more successes on the field. This change gave her an edge on the field and made her an all-round phenomenal player. This combination gave her skills such as footwork, excellent ball control, a hard shot and heading abilities. She had speed, strength, toughness and her shot was “an unstoppable force in the air”. She also had a big impact off the field adding, a fun and lively personality to the team.

In her fourth year of College soccer, she earned some major awards within the world of soccer including the award for “Big East Defensive Player of the Year”⁴. She also was classified in the final 15 candidates nominated for the 2003 Hermann Trophy. She returned for a fifth year of eligibility and received many of the same awards as her previous year at Notre Dame. On top of those awards, Tancredi was named one of the Irish Tri-captains. In the same year she was debuted to play for Canada in an Olympic qualifier against Jamaica, and started for several games throughout the qualifiers.

In 2006 she was a member of a couple of teams that finished as runners up. First she was on Canada’s Peace Queen Cup team that finished second in the tournament⁵. Shortly after, in that same year she was part of the CONCACAF Gold Cup team where Canada finished second behind the United States. The following year she was on Canada’s Women’s World Cup team where she played in three games and scored a game tying goal against Australia. This goal is of importance considering her position on the team. As a defender there are very few opportunities to shoot on net, let alone score. Scoring a goal is due to her hard and accurate shooting which she developed in her years of playing and training as a forward striker. She was also a

⁴ http://www.und.com/sports/w-soccer/mtt/tancredi_melissa00.html

⁵ <http://www.womenprosoccer.com/players/freeagents/melissa-ta...>

member of the Canadian bronze medal team at the Pan American Games that same year.

Melissa's biggest year to date in her career was 2008. That year, her accomplishments outweighed all those achieved up to this point in her career. She went to Beijing that year for the Summer Olympics as a member of the Olympic team. She was a starting player in three of the games and scored one goal in the match against Sweden.⁶ Tancredi took Canada to the quarter-finals, to the match where the team encountered an unfortunate loss against the United States. During the Olympic Games qualifying tournament, she was the top scorer in the whole tournament "scoring four goals in four games". Her biggest accomplishment was the fact that she was the winning goal scorer who qualified Canada for the Olympics for the very first time.⁷

This past year she was again on the Canadian team that finished as runners-up in the Cyprus Cup. During the Cyprus Cup she scored again, however this time at a game in which her team won. When it came to the final game of the tournament, she assisted in our country's single goal against England in our 3-1 loss⁸. "'Amazing," was Tancredi's description of the feeling that came over her after the strike, a lovely diving header of an Amy Walsh through ball. "I just love scoring no matter what, no matter where it is."⁹(Toronto Star, August 3, 2008, Doug Smith)These past few years, her international career has flourished like no other. With the big name tournaments that

⁶ <http://www.womenprosoccer.com/players/freeagents/melissa-ta...>

⁷ <http://www.canadasoccer.com/players/profile.asp?playerid=385>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <http://olympics.thestar.com/2010/article/477318>

she has competed in during the past two years especially, she has made a name for herself on a grander scale.

At the age of 28, Melissa Tancredi has not mentioned anything about retiring or taking a step back in her career. With an international career that has only recently really taken off, Canadians all across the country are hoping that she will stick around for several more years to help Canada make it even further in the world of soccer¹⁰. Now, as the next generation of competitive players attempts to make the Canadian teams, Tancredi has the opportunity to mentor and help younger teammates to really make it in their sport and make a name for themselves while improving their skills. She is seen as a role model and idol for many young female soccer players. Canada has never before had such a strong women's soccer team, and now with this icon in our midst, girls are seeing it as a possibility more now than ever of really making it far in the world of soccer. With Tancredi making such an impact on the Canadian team, there are many girls whose dreams of making it into the big league can really be a possibility.

¹⁰ <http://www.canadasoccer.com/players/profile.asp?playerid=385>

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After the Interview:

Melissa is currently living in St. Louis, so unfortunately a personal interview was not possible. In the end we had to email her the interview questions which was still successful. Melissa has a very outgoing personality and really adds comic relief for the team in times of trial. Her influence on her fellow teammates is really motivating for them all to do their best, and accept the outcome of a game having the attitude of whether they deserved the loss or not. She is a very optimistic person that really works to find the best in negative things.

Melissa started her soccer career when she was four years old. She started in a boy's league because at the time she began soccer there were no girls leagues for her age group. She grew up as they typical athletic child with involvement with all sports under the sun. She has very supportive parents whom allowed her to participate in whatever activities she wanted to.

There are a ton of pressures within the professional sporting world, however Melissa really takes the pressures and uses them to her advantage. Melissa does not find the same stresses other individuals find in the sport, rather she looks at her career as being something she loves and finds training as a way to clear her mind as the skills come so naturally to her. She finds external pressures when she is playing to represent Canada on a global scale. She states in the interview that "there is a large pressure to stay healthy and to perform, but with any job, that pressure will always be there. You have to be able to perform consistently."

There are not many obstacles that she has had to overcome, however the few there are seem pretty significant, especially when these things happen to someone whose career requires excellent physical wellbeing. She describes a torn ACL the week before her freshman year at Notre Dame, prohibiting her from playing the entire year. She describes her experience as “such a hard thing to deal with especially because up to that time I hadn’t had any major injuries. Going through surgery and physiotherapy starting from the beginning all in a new city, school, away from my family for the first time in my life. It was really hard. “ Her second biggest struggle is that of being a full time medical student and being a full time athlete. She says she has never had to push herself physically and mentally so hard in her life. These are things that would put a lot of stress on any individual, and she has done an incredible job coping with these stresses.

Unfortunately, not many people realize how much the city and province do for their athletes financially. Without their funding young athletes wouldn’t be able to cover the costs to train at the level needed to compete at a nationally. Growing up in Ontario was another blessing for Melissa; as statistics show that Ontario has most soccer clubs in all of Canada. The youth system in Ontario is extraordinary, and the amount of opportunity it offers every young soccer athlete is commendable. If it weren’t for their competitive rep leagues and provincial teams, Melissa would not have had the opportunity to represent Canada or have attended a D-1 school on a full scholarship.

It is very motivational for athletes to have a sport idol as someone they can look up to and aspire to be like. When first starting out her soccer career, Melissa looked up to Julie Foudy. Melissa describes that it is a little strange that a Canadian soccer

player looked up to an American, however she makes sure to say that the Canadian soccer team was not very strong at the time. As of right now she looks up to anyone who works hard and totally commits themselves to the sport.

Melissa has an interesting way of finding and achieving motivation. She finds her motivation in the doubt of others. She is very confident in herself and knows when the appropriate time to push herself to the limits is. She had a very comical response describing her motivation through other's doubt in stating: "If you want me to do something, tell me I can't because then my crazy Italian stubbornness will kick in and I'm going to do anything in my power to prove you wrong." This small statement shows just how much a comment that would be meant as negative would push her and make her strive to achieve what others would think unachievable. This attitude and outlook on sports motivation is one that has helped her in the past and continues to help her when it comes to dealing with the public, with coaches, teammates and critics.

When talking about Melissa's professional career, she said it was a very fast move. It was never something that she had thought much about or made a long hard decision about, it "just sort of happened". She goes on further to discuss how after college, everything happened very quickly. It was not an environment that she felt comfortable in at first, especially not as a player. She did not find that her level of play was high enough, and she was not sure that it even made her happy to have made the National Team. Before long, she had her confidence back in her game, felt comfortable on the field in her position and was a regular with the girls on the team at camps and trainings. She states that this was the turning point that made soccer number one for her. She says, "Until that moment, soccer wasn't my primary profession." She also

deems the success of the Canadian Woman's National Team as her entrance into other new areas and allowed her opportunities such as playing in the newly developed Women's Pro Soccer League in the States for St. Louis. All of this success has had a great influence on her as well as teammates and she is not even retired yet. Tancredi can look forward to more success in her sport as she continues to play.

For curiosity sake, we asked a question about what Melissa thinks of Christians playing at a professional level, and how their faith may impact the players and their attitudes toward the sport. Melissa had a very surprising response when she described her thoughts and views of faith in the sporting world. "If people are dedicated Christians they would strive to be "Godly", whether it is having good sportsmanship or being a good role model by performing at their best, or just generally thinking that being able to play sports for a living was a blessing. To me personally, faith would offer me strength whether it be mentally or physically, but having a strong faith allows you to embody the strength needed to succeed. I also see it from the opposite end in that I was given a gift and I am fulfilling my life's journey by using my gift to its fullest and enjoying every bit of the life I have been given. When talking about performance specifically, I'm not sure having an outside faith really can affect ones performance. However, having faith in yourself and your abilities will allow you to reach your max performance." I find what she said to be very interesting in the sense that she is not a Christian; however seems to completely understand and relate to what it means to believe in our Saviour and to have the confidence and faith that He will use you and your gifts to their fullest, honouring Him in all you do. In her situation, it would be beneficial not only for the

individual to have faith, but also for the team as the motivation to work for the best of your ability is contagious throughout all the players.

Melissa knows that to get to where she is today, it took a lot more than just an effort from herself, but also support from those around her and having faith, in her case, in her abilities. She has been on a long journey to get to where she is at, and it is not yet finished. There is still more to see from this leader and very skilled player as she continues to follow her dream and play to the best of her abilities to achieve her goals and also help teammates to grow and achieve their own. She is truly a player of recognition and praise.