



FILE PHOTO: BEN BEGLEY

**FLAG-CHIC** Carline Muir didn't make the 400m final at the Pan Am Games last week, but she'll have another chance on the 4x100m relay this weekend.

## Home-grown track stars take their show on the road

DAN PLOUFFE  
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RIO DE JANEIRO (CUP)—For most elite Canadian track and field athletes, the road to the top leads through a university in the United States. The decision to go south of the border is usually pretty simple: there's better coaching, better facilities, great competition, no funding problems, and of course, full athletic scholarships.

Nevertheless, five of the 30 Canadian track and field athletes competing at the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro chose the Canadian university route, while many more train in the country.

Jim Steacy (University of Lethbridge), Carline Muir (University of Alberta), Emanuel Parris (Université de Sherbrooke), Jessica Zelinka (University of Calgary) and Dalhousie graduate Adrienne Power all had different reasons for staying in Canada, but they all felt that it fit their personal situation best.

Steacy improved on his Canadian record in the hammer throw in mid-June and now hopes to win a medal at the Pan Am Games. He stayed because he was lucky enough to have one of North America's best technical throws coaches right in his hometown.

"To have [Larry Steinke] in my own backyard where I grew up is just a huge luck of the draw," Steacy said. "I had offers in the States and other Canadian schools and I turned them down to stay at a school of 8000.

"It's a small program—we were building this past year, so it's a little tough that way. But it's a great program; the school is supportive, and it's a great community. And it's home, so to be able to compete in my hometown, that's a nice bonus."

Muir's athletic life has been out of the ordinary as well. Although she competes for the Pandas, she does her training with Legacy Athletics, a program established after Edmonton hosted the IAAF World Track and Field Championships in 2001.

University of Alberta is home to the Canadian Athletics Coaching Centre (CACC), so top-notch guidance and coaching was a big reason Muir turned down a "full-ride" from Texas A&M. Edmonton offered the chance to work with both CACC coach Kevin Tyler and sprinters Tyler Christopher, Adam Kunkel, Keston Nelson, and Brian Barnett.

"The first day when I made that decision, I was like, 'I can't believe I'm taking out my warm-weather clothes and putting in sweaters and stuff,'" Muir laughs.

Muir, who said she doesn't regret her decision to stay in Canada, also enjoys being able to choose when she wants to compete.

"I don't know if I could do that in the States," she said. Muir suffered a stress fracture before she was going to leave for Texas A&M and wasn't sure if she would have been allowed an adequate amount of time off to heal if she had gone there.

The burnout factor is another big concern for some athletes who choose to stay in Canada. Some were worried that they would be pushed too hard for four years without regard for their long-term health or future goals.

The downside, of course, is the Canadian winter. Jamaican-born Muir isn't a big fan of the cold, and training indoors presents its own problems.

"There can be a lot of people on the track at one time because everyone is inside," Muir said. "A lot of accidents happen. Some people can't even run any more because they twist their ankle when there's someone not looking who runs across the track."

Muir recently set a new personal-best of 52.03s in the 400m sprint at a meet in Mexico. Her goal was to set a new personal-best at the Pan Am Games, and earn a spot at this year's World Championships.

Things didn't go as planned for Muir in the 400m, however. She finished in fifth place in the third heat of the event. Her time of 53.25s earned her

15th spot overall out of the 22 competitors, and out of the final.

"When I finished, I thought I had a lot more in me, so I'm a little disappointed in myself," said Muir, who improved on her 53.66s time from two weekends ago at the Canadian championships, but missed her hopes for a new personal-best. "I still went out there and did my best but I could have run a lot faster and done a lot better."

Muir, running in the outside lane, was fighting from behind from the start due to a slow reaction time to the gun (.513s compared to most others around .3s). Muir said she was a little thrown off because she wasn't expecting the "on your mark" and "set" calls to be in Portuguese instead of English.

"There's some really great girls out here running," she said. "It's really nice to be on the senior team and to be able to run against some of the best in the world. [This race] was part of the learning curve, but I'm very impatient, so it's tough sometimes."

Muir is also expected to race in the women's 4x400m relay event on Saturday.

Zelinka's spot at the World Championships is secure since she's the world's tenth-ranked heptathlete. The winner of five gold medals and one silver at this year's CIS championships is aiming for nothing less than gold in Rio de Janeiro, and her ultimate goal is to win a medal at the 2008 Olympics.

The London, ON native competed for the University of Western Ontario before moving on to U of C for the 2002/03 and 2003/04 seasons. She took two years off, and returned to the Dinos last year.

"I just needed a change of scenery and there was a good multi-event training group in Calgary," Zelinka said. "I didn't really have lots of people to train with in London at the time. And Les Gramantik, the national team training coach, was there."

## Edmonton swimmer takes dip into record books

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Though she no longer wears the Green and Gold, Alberta swimming fans still have reason to be proud of former Panda and current national team member Annamay Pierse. She set two Canadian records and took home three silver medals at the Pan American Games last week.

Pierse swam a 2:26.79 in the 200m breaststroke on Sunday, beating the previous Canadian record, that had stood since 1988. It was also enough for second place behind American Caitlin Leverenz, who set a Games record.

Pierse also broke a national record and earned a silver medal in the women's 100m breaststroke event, putting up a time of 1:07.78. To top that off, she swam one leg in the 4x100m medley relay, which put a third silver around her neck.

"I had the best time," she said. "I

swam faster than I ever expected."

Her accomplishments helped Canada bring in 18 swimming medals—one gold, five silver, and twelve bronze medals—five more than the team earned at the last Pan Am Games in Santa Domingo, Dominican Republic.

These latest achievements didn't just fall into Pierse's lap: she's been swimming competitively since she was seven years old. A native Edmontonian, she started her swimming career with the Edmonton Keyano Swim Club, before competing for the University of Alberta for two years.

"I actually still hold a U of A record in the 200m breaststroke," Pierse said.

Pierse is now in her third year of a psychology degree at UBC. She trains at the National Swimming Center in Vancouver with the Dolphins, UBC's club team, which during the varsity season competes as the Thunderbirds.

Even with these medals under her belt, Pierse has no plans to slow down,



FILE PHOTO: WEIYANGLIU

**THAT BEAR LOOKS LIKE IT'S DROWNING** Former Panda Annamay Pierse has set a new Canadian record in the pool.

especially with two more major events this summer. Nationals are in Calgary this weekend, and she'll be racing in the Universiade Games in August. The rest of the year will be spent at school and training for Olympic trials in April.

Pierse hopes to be able to represent

Canada at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing next August, and to continue competing for years to come.

"I like everything about swimming. I love the fact that I get to travel and meet so many different people, go to events like the Pan Am Games, and see

things from an athlete's perspective," she said. "I love training hard—as much as I don't like it sometimes when I'm actually doing it, I like the way you can get out [of the pool] after a hard workout and be like 'Oh my goodness, I can't believe I just did that.'"