

> CHRISTINE SINCLAIR

Soccer champ leaves it all on the field

Christine Sinclair says her inspiration comes from an athletic family and Terry Fox

LI ROBBINS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Christine Sinclair is, at heart, a team player. As captain of the 2012 Olympic bronze medal-winning Canadian women's national soccer team, she seems to view every victory, including her induction into the Walk of Fame, as shared.

"It just goes to show the strides our team and the sport have made in Canada recently," she said by phone from Portland, Ore., where she plays professional soccer with the Portland Thorns.

Not to say she isn't thrilled on her own behalf. "When I got the news I was just in shock, thinking about how my life has changed in the past year. You know, I never thought something like this would even be possible for a woman soccer player."

Sinclair is not just any woman soccer player, of course; the 30-year-old is one of the best in the world. The list of her awards is impressively long, but among the highlights is winning the Canada Soccer Player of the Year award — 10 times.

Last year, not only was she the 2012 Summer Olympics top scorer with six goals, (breaking the record for most goals scored in Olympic women's soccer), she also received the Lou Marsh Trophy for Canadian Athlete of the Year, as well as the Bobbie Rosenfeld Award for Canada's Female Athlete of the Year.

Still, she sees the Walk of Fame award as special. "First of all, it's not just for sports," she says. "Which I think sets it apart."

It's the impact the success of the team has had on kids that delights Sinclair the most. When she appears at soccer camps, children hang onto her every word.

"It's so cute, the questions they ask — from when did you start playing soccer, to where do you keep your Olympic medal," she says. "And then you get the young ones asking, 'What's your favourite colour?' It's adorable."

But Sinclair also knows young Canadians' admiration for her is ultimately more than just adorable, it's evidence of a sea change in awareness of her sport.

When I was younger," she recalls, "I didn't even know there was a woman's national team. I didn't know about the World Cup, or women's soccer in the Olympics. Now little kids can dream about representing the country, and that's something I



CANADIAN SOCCER ASSOCIATION

Christine Sinclair, widely considered one of the best players in the world, has won the Canada Soccer Player of the Year award 10 times.

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What she did have at a young age, growing up in Burnaby B.C., was an athletic family that included a talented older brother and two uncles who were in the North American Soccer League.

"For me," she says, "inspiration came more from family, trying to keep up with my brother, playing soccer, baseball, you name it."

Sinclair's earliest sports hero outside the family was former Toronto Blue Jay second baseman Roberto Alomar, in large part because she too played second base.

But it took speedskater Catriona Le May Doan winning Olympic medals for Sinclair to fully appreciate the possibilities that lay ahead.

"That was the first time I paid attention to truly caring about the Olympics," she says.

"Seeing a Canadian like that succeed at the highest level."

Another source of inspiration is a Canadian who died before she was born, fellow Walk of Fame 2013 inductee Terry Fox.

"Growing up running the Terry Fox run every year in school, I want to single him out," she says. "The strength and courage that he showed, and the legacy that he left behind."

Some might say her own legacy as someone with the courage of her convictions was established following a disputed referee call at the 2012 Olympics. Her outspoken reaction resulted in a four-game suspension levied by FIFA, soccer's governing body. But, alongside her spectacular performance on the field, the Olympic moment that promises to outlive that skirmish was her role as Canada's flag bearer in the closing ceremony.



JONATHAN HAYWARD/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Sinclair has the record for most goals scored in Olympic women's soccer.

What went through her mind? "Trying not to trip," she says with a laugh. "Literally, because there was a bunch of cords on the ground. And just trying my best to soak it all up, soak it all in. Looking around, it was just incredible, but it was like a blur."

Sinclair doesn't spend a lot of time looking back, though — not with Canada's role as host of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup on the hori-

zon. She's excited about playing, and about the "satisfaction of putting on the Canadian jersey."

Because, in the end, it's all about the team. "I hope my teammates know I'll do anything for them," she says. "Especially when you're representing your country, you're not just representing yourself; you're representing everyone back home. So you just leave it all on the field."