



## An athlete with true grit: Lambert plays with confidence

### Jules 'Sparky' Xavier

Laurie Lambert is no ordinary person. The 5' tall twenty year old, who hails from Lachine, Quebec, spoke with *Excalibur* following her return from the World Cup in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where Canada finished 5th amongst the top field hockey powers.

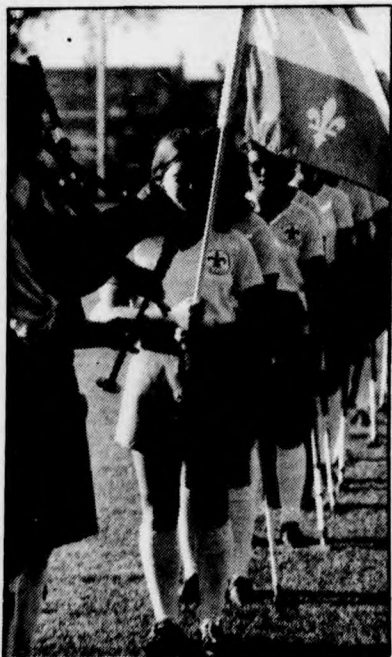
She sits hunched over in her long red housecoat on a couch in her living room flipping through the pages of the newspaper as she answers questions put to her. She answers them like a seasoned veteran. Her answers are crisp and professional due to her relaxed nature. She makes you feel at home in her comfortable apartment situated in the Jane-Finch Corridor.

Lambert has had to persevere before finally getting the opportunity to represent Canada on the field hockey pitch. She was named to the Canadian squad in 1977 but didn't make the team until the summer of 1980 when Canada toured Europe. Since then she has played in fourteen international matches. She scored her first goal for Canada in a 3-2 loss to West Germany last October at Toronto's Lamport Stadium.

It's really difficult to describe this athlete who has a great deal of self-esteem. She's strong and stalky; her captivating looks and piercing blue eyes truly exude a hard-won confidence. The two words that best describe her are strength and confidence.

On and off the field she's two different people. On the pitch she's a team player. This reflects her need of other people in her life. "I never would have made it in an individual sport," she says. In a game she's constantly hustling and never quits no matter what the score. She hangs tough against her opponents. At home she's quiet but at times does crazy things because it doesn't embarrass her. Most people see a serious individual but she says it's not the real Laurie Lambert.

In Argentina Lambert was more than satisfied with her play. "Overall I'd say I had a good tournament. As it went along I got better. I gained more confidence in myself. I was able to take more chances and this allowed me to play more aggressive. I carried the ball more. At first I was cautious and didn't want to make mistakes. I was able to help out more offensively."



A young Laurie Lambert (with flag) was the captain of the 1973 Quebec Junior team.

Canada finished with a 5-2 record yet they perhaps should have finished higher in the standings according to Lambert. "We (Canada) could have played better than we did. The team should have been a lot more aggressive especially in the circle. We did play well defensively though. Mistakes hurt us though and that's when they took advantage and scored on us. Our offense had trouble clicking throughout the tournament."

She thought the inexperience of her team was a key component that has to be overcome. "We have one person with more than 50 international games (caps) while a few have more than 20. Teams like Holland have played together for years and this experience shows in their play."

Other areas that Canada was weak in were their short corners and offensive thrusts. "Other teams near our circle would get a good shot at the net or come up with a short corner. Canada would get six shots in a row and would end up being cleared out without anything. More experienced forwards will get a short corner most of the time. Our corners weren't as good as they could have been," Lambert said between sips of her cup of hot chocolate.

The teams competing in the World Cup each differed in their approach against Canada observed Lambert. She had these comments about each team Canada faced:

"Holland is a strong team. They use the field well by throwing the ball into the open space and then running onto it. Their forwards are extremely smart and know when to cut and then pass into the open space. Their man to man marking is excellent. We learned this from them. In our 4-0 loss we had many opportunities but weren't able to capitalize on them."

"Against Japan in our 3-1 victory we overpowered them. They come into the game thinking we're better than they are and they're attitude is they're going to lose anyway. They have an automated short corner. Each person has a role, they're like machines."

"In our first game against Spain we were a little nervous and didn't play good hockey. They are a rough team but we prevailed 3-0." "Belgium is another rough team. They play not to win but to stop you from winning. If they couldn't get the ball then you wouldn't either. If it meant tripping you then they did. They weren't a good field hockey team but teams rarely got more than two goals on them."

"Going into the game against Austria we were disappointed about not being in the semi's after losses to Holland and Australia. It affected our play considerably. You have to be mentally prepared for a game and we weren't. Added to this was Austria showing up late for the game. Much of the play was confined to the midfield."

"We were all over Australia for the first 20 minutes and scored right off. As the first half ended they put a lot of pressure on us and this is when we started to get into trouble. They came out to win in the second half. Scoring two quick goals fired them up and with two defensive mistakes late in the half they scored two more



Laurie Lambert seen here in a workout during World Cup action in Argentina: "Overall I'd say I had a good tournament. As it went along I got better. I gained more confidence in myself."

goals. The game had been close up to then."

Playing for fifth spot Canada defeated the host nation Argentina 3-0. "We overpowered them. We covered their tight man to man. We were intercepting their passes the whole game as they continued to pass directly to the marked man instead of the open spaces."

Canada has improved significantly over the past few years in field hockey. Their 5th place finish in the World Cup is one sign. "We're knocking on the door of the top four," Lambert confessed. "Top teams are having trouble with us and they're not taking us lightly when they play us now. We're not a warm up team anymore."

A demure Lambert, her soft voice breaking the silence of the room talks about her start in field hockey as the household cat looks for some affection from her. She obliges with a quick pat.

"I was into playing all sports but was asked to come out and try field hockey when I was 12. I don't know if I was a natural but I picked it up and continued from there."

From this point you could say she took to the game and her life changed for the good of Canada. The following year when she was selected to the 1973 Quebec Junior team. "I was taught the

skills and we finished 5th that year," she said. "I didn't know how to dodge but was taught to scoop the ball. Being young the coach had us in such good shape that we just outlasted our opponents."

She played left wing in her first year. Her main job was to carry the ball up the field with her quick speed and then scoop the ball into the middle for the other forwards. It sounds rather comical but she continued to learn the game and got better as she went along.

Lambert continued to pursue field hockey from that point on and hasn't had any regrets since. When she was 16 she played on three different Quebec teams including the Junior, Senior and the Quebec team that took part in the Canadian Summer Games in 1977. Her team finished 4th.

As a player she enjoys working hard at something. She has no qualms about going into the gym and hitting the ball against the wall a 100 times. "I like to sweat," she said with a positive note, "I then feel like I've worked hard. I have the same attitude when I go out and play and know I'm a better player even if Canada is 5th in the world."

Their is no doubt in her mind of what she must put into the game in order to be the best. "My goal

is to be as good or play as well as West Germany's Birgit Hagen, who at the tender age of 22 is the captain of the number one team in the world."

Her strength lies in her ability to handle pressure. Being designated as Canada's penalty stroker brings an added burden onto the mighty shoulders of Lambert. She takes it in stride though. "A person must be able to handle this added pressure. With the score tied and a stroke awarded late in the game one can



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