

## King City's Adriana Leon and the Canadian Women's National Soccer Team crashes out of Olympics quarterfinals

After a hard-fought 120-minute scoreless draw with Germany descended into a heart-breaking loss on penalty kicks (4-2), Team Canada's defence of its Gold Medal ended in the Olympic quarterfinals in France on Saturday.

The play of two-time Olympian Adriana Leon --a resident of King City --had been instrumental in the national squad fashioning a 3-0 record in Group Play.

The battle-tested team --led by veterans like the 31-year-old Leon --overcame the noise of the Drone Scandal, the suspension of its Head Coach, and a six-point penalty being levied against their impressive perfect record to head into the showdown versus Germany with a degree of positive momentum.

Leon, the Aston Villa professional and Country Day School graduate, was snake-bitten during key moments versus Germany.

In the 71st minute, Leon broke in alone on the German goalkeeper Ann-Katrin Berger. Berger saved Leon's breakaway shot, deflecting it out of harm's way with her leg to keep the game scoreless.

During penalty kicks, Leon missed her second opportunity versus Berger --a stark contrast to Leon's triumphant penalty kick in Canada's shootout victory over Brazil during the Olympic quarterfinals in Tokyo in 2021.

High performance sports can be like that. Sometimes you're the hammer and sometimes you're the nail.

As Bruce Arthur noted in The Toronto Star, "From the 57th minute --when Canada brought in Adriana Leon, Evelyn Viens, and Cloe Lacasse --they shoved the Germans, created chance after chance, dominated for long stretches. They could have scored three. Leon, above all, will see a least three different plays in her dreams, maybe for years."

Despite the disappointment versus Germany, Leon has her gold medal. She has also cobbled together a successful ten-year professional career on both sides of the Atlantic. Playing in the world's top leagues and in two Olympics speak to Leon's glowing achievements on the soccer pitch both at home and abroad.

The "Drone Scandal" has become one of the darkest chapters in Canadian Olympic history and the consequences for the country's most-decorated soccer team have been dire.

Their Head Coach Bev Priestman has been suspended for a year and will likely face further personal penalties when the Olympics are over.

Two of her staff members have been sent home from Paris for their illegal surveillance of an opponent.

FIFA levied a fine of \$226,000 for the unsportsmanlike act of using a drone to spy on New Zealand's practice and stealing insights into their first round opponent's Olympic strategy.

But the greatest punishment was meted out on the team --fairly or unfairly --by deducting six points as a penalty against future wins in Group Play.

This created an almost-impossible scenario for the defending Olympic Gold medalists.

With the coaching staff decimated by suspension, veteran players on the squad needed to step up and Team Canada weathered the storm in Paris with thrilling 2-1 wins over New Zealand and France.

Although the team must feel like Sisyphus rolling a boulder up the hill every day only to see it roll back down again, Leon's coaches from The Country Day School earlier shared their belief and pride in their graduate's efforts to persevere on the big stage in Paris.

CDS's Jenny Cooper, who has coached the Cyclones Soccer team for 12 seasons, expressed the community's pride in seeing Leon's successes as a two-time Olympian.

?It's super exciting for us as a school to see Adriana perform on a high profile stage. It's a celebration of community.?

Coach Cooper added, ?We try to instill in our players to maintain a healthy, active lifestyle and understand the benefits of being part of a team. It's cool to see a former student and player stick with and love a sport as Adriana does.?

The veteran coach, who has taught at The Country Day School for 17 years, also expressed the importance of Adriana Leon performing at a high level in the Olympics.

?Adriana's legacy and story are so important ? it's a really positive story connected to our sports program. We're so excited for her. We watched her grow up as a person and athlete. We knew she had goals and she has achieved them. It's every athlete's dream. You feel a special connection during moments like these and it's emotional.?

Coach Cooper's long-time colleague Peter Milonas concurred.

?Having a CDS graduate like Adriana Leon compete in the Olympics on a high-profile, championship-calibre national team is a profound source of pride and inspiration for the entire CDS community.?

The CDS Department Head of Health and Physical Education also praised Adriana Leon's presence on the pitch as a gold medalist and two-time Olympian.

?It deeply resonates with the next generation of CDS students. Her achievements bring immense pride and joy to the community. It's a shared celebration of her hard work and the support she received from teachers, coaches, and peers. It's a reminder that they are part of a community that stands behind them, cheering them on every step of the way.?

**By Jim Stewart**