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# Charmaine Smith cherishing opportunity to play international rugby

Theme:  
Leadership



Co-authored by Paul Eddison, Clydebank Post

Charmaine Smith knows just what it feels like to have your hopes and dreams ripped away from you, so the Black Ferns star is cherishing every opportunity to play international rugby.

A latecomer to the sport, Smith was part of the New Zealand team that won the World Cup in 2017 but was forced to retire from the sport in 2020 after a bulging disk in her neck was found on a routine scan.

Out of nowhere, her playing days were over. But after having a baby girl, Amīria, in 2021, a follow-up scan showed that the disk was no longer pressing against her spine, opening up the possibility of taking up the sport she loved once again.

Smith did just that, and last year made her return for New Zealand. Currently part of the Black Ferns’ squad competing in the Pacific-4 Series, it has been a whirlwind journey for the second row.

She said: “I never thought I would be back here, so I cherish every moment I have with the team in this environment. I know what it’s like to have it ripped away when it’s not your choice. It’s really special to be back and I’ve enjoyed hanging out with the team and learning new things.

“It was quite a unique situation; I didn’t have any pain, but I had a scan of my neck, but the doctors did a scan of my neck and said it was unsafe for me to keep playing. I didn’t have any symptoms, so I didn’t even know it was there.

“I retired from playing and had a baby. I had a follow-up scan to see how everything was going but the doctors didn’t have their hopes up at all. On my follow-up scan, which was eight days after having my baby, it (the disk) had moved off my spinal cord and I was able to play again. It was a bit of a miracle; I call her my miracle baby. She came along and it moved off my neck.

“It was really tough to accept, I definitely thought that was it for me. The scan was just to see if it was getting worse. I was out of the game, and it was really hard to process it at the time. Looking back at the journey, it’s taught me a lot of things. I think it makes me a better person in this environment now because I know what it’s like to not have the little things like jersey presentations or the time with your teammates, the fun we have together. When you are not playing, there is none of that anymore. I think it makes me a better person and a better athlete.”

Having first played for the Black Ferns back in 2015, Smith is now one of the more experienced members of the squad, where a host of new faces are trying to force their way into contention following the World Cup success in 2022 on home soil.

As well as being a mum to baby Amīria, Smith has also taken on a motherly role within the squad.

She said: “There’s a really special culture within the team. It’s a group of really awesome individuals and coming through as a team is very special.

“I’ve been away from the game and came back. The game of rugby as a whole has grown since I was last in the team. I want to be the best I can for the team. If I can draw on some of my experience from the last time I was in the team, I try and help. The younger girls in the team call me camp mum. I enjoy being whatever the team need me to be. Whether that is driving the van because I’m over 30 and ensured to drive or organising them.”

Smith is one of three mums in the squad, along with Aldora Itunu and Kate Henwood.

And after thinking that she would never be back playing on this stage, she admits there was a lot of emotion when she made her return to the set-up last year.

She recalled: “It’s hard to find words to describe it. It was really emotional; I remember when they named me in the team. It came up on the projector and I just started crying. We had to go from the team naming from training, I was thinking how am I going to train now?

“It’s even more special because I have a daughter as well now. That’s a whole new thing. I want her to know every day that she can be whatever she wants to be. I get to live a life that proves that and shows her that.”

  
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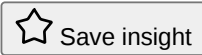
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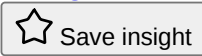
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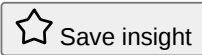
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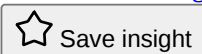


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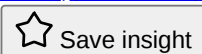
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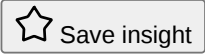
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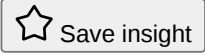
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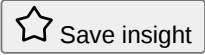
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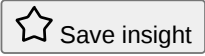
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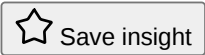
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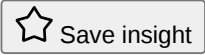


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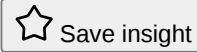
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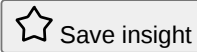
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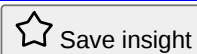
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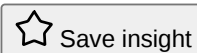
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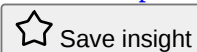
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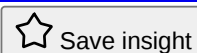
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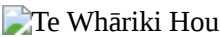
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