

Jess Neilson
British Columbia



Tackling the Diploma Programme

Looking for a stimulating programme of study to complement her rugby prowess, Jess Neilson turned to the Diploma Programme.

At the age of eight, Jess Neilson discovered rugby by watching her sister play. Just a day later, she decided she wanted to play the sport too. Now she is recognized as a talented star of the University of Victoria Vikes – the collegiate rugby team that recently won the Canadian University Sevens championship title.

Jess is also a Diploma Programme alumnus, and her passion for rugby went hand-in-hand with that. She chose to attend Carson Graham Secondary School, knowing that it had the best girl's rugby programme in British Columbia. But that wasn't the only reason she chose the school – the fact that it offered the DP played a role in her decision as well.

And it was rugby that informed her decision to take the DP.

"I play rugby at a pretty competitive level so I've always looked for ways to push and challenge myself outside the sport as well," Jess explains. The DP offered her the opportunity to do just that.

It's only fitting then that rugby helped Jess get through her DP studies. "The DP forced me to work hard for what I wanted to accomplish -- the full diploma," she says. "The DP enhanced [my] quality and drive." Her experiences as a rugby player perfectly complemented her DP experience.

Rugby was an integral part of Jess' CAS project too. In her words, "action was simple enough." As for the service component, she describes it as "giving back to the community of a sport which has given me so much."

Due to her Thai roots and involvement in the international rugby community, Jess created an opportunity to work with the Nak Suu Tigers for her CAS project. She organized a cleat drive, and collected donations for young rugby players in Thailand.

"I actually got to go to Thailand and deliver the cleats in person," she says.

As a student at the University of Victoria, studying political science and public administration while continuing her rugby career, Jess is incredibly positive about the skills she learned in the DP. "The time management that was required to complete all my class work, CAS, and to train at a high level was instrumental throughout my time at university."

In addition to time management and balance that the DP encouraged, she says "it set me up to build off the networking opportunities and relationships I developed."

The skills Jess developed in the DP were huge takeaways for her. She says she would recommend it to others in her position – talented athletes with the ambition to play competitively at university, and possibly professionally.

For Jess, "the rewards have far surpassed the struggle" presented by the DP.

Considering her consistent success in rugby, and in academics, this truth is hard to deny. She has already made an impressive career for herself, and in all likelihood, she's not done yet.

"I'm hoping to eventually play overseas, in New Zealand, England, or France," she says. "I would like to continue representing Canada as long as I can, with the hope of playing in a World Cup."

That certainly would be quite the achievement. But with so much experience under her belt, Jess is well on her way there.