

# LaSalle swimmer Kylie Masse grows into Olympian



*JIM PARKER, WINDSOR STAR*

[More from Jim Parker, Windsor Star](http://windsorstar.com/author/jim-parker-windsor-star) ([HTTP://WINDSORSTAR.COM/AUTHOR/JIM-PARKER-WINDSOR-STAR](http://windsorstar.com/author/jim-parker-windsor-star))

Published on: April 22, 2016 | Last Updated: April 22, 2016 6:33 PM EDT



Swimmer Kylie Masse, of LaSalle, has qualified for the 2016 Summer Olympics. *MARTIN BAZYL / WINDSOR STAR*

Andrei Semenov did not see a future Olympian when LaSalle's Kylie Masse joined the Windsor Essex Swim Team more than a decade ago.

"She was so small," said the Russian-born Semenov. "She was one of the smallest girls."

Two weeks ago, Semenov was poolside in Toronto to see Masse — who now stands at five-foot-eight — set a new Canadian record in the women's 100-metre backstroke at the Canadian Olympic and Para-swimming Trials. Her time of 59.06 seconds not only clinched a spot on the Canadian team for the Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro, but was the second-fastest recorded time in the event in the world this year.

"It's pretty surreal," said Masse, 20. "I've always dreamed of it. This past year, it's become a more realistic dream."

The University of Toronto Varsity Blues' standout sophomore was still sporting her WEST swim cap and warm up shirt when she slipped into the water for her record swim.

"She came before every race to talk to me," Semenov said. "She came to talk to me after every race. She's absolutely level-headed and it's so nice to see. She doesn't forget where she came from."





Swimmer Kylie Masse, of LaSalle, has qualified for the 2016 Summer Olympics.  
*MARTIN BAZYL / COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO*

It was a big step for Masse when she stepped away from the LaSalle Lizards summer program at the town's outdoor pool on Front Road to join WEST, where Semenov and coach Lou Pocock started her in the SEAL program

"The swimming was my thing because they all had to learn to swim," said mom Cindy Masse, who had Kylie's older brother Daniel and younger sister Natalie enrolled as well. "They all did lessons, but she got through them fast."

And so, it was off to WEST, but Masse continued to play competitive soccer with the LaSalle Stompers and mix in some hockey along with the usual grade school sports at St. Joseph's Catholic Elementary School in River Canard.

"I think she was 12 and then there just weren't enough hours in the day," Cindy Masse said.

That's when the decision was made to focus on the pool where she became the four-time winner of WEST's club swimmer of the year award.

"We don't give it because a person is fast, but because a person is a leader of the program and she is a leader," Semenov said. "When she comes home at Christmas or at a school break, she comes out and our practises are so much faster. Not because the practice on the board has changed, but because they want to be fast like her."

Masse had plenty of success club swimming, but her career has taken off since joining the Varsity Blues program.

"I definitely left WEST with a good foundation and loved swimming with WEST," said Masse, who was in the midst of exams this past week. "The coaches were amazing, but it's challenging being in a different

program and I've added a lot more weight and strength and power (training) to succeed and I think that was helpful."



Swimmer Kylie Masse, of LaSalle, has qualified for the 2016 Summer Olympics.  
*MARTIN BAZYL / WINDSOR STAR*

Masse was named Ontario University Athletics rookie of the year and swimmer of the year as a freshman with the Varsity Blues after winning four individual gold medals, which was each in OUA record time. She won another gold medal and added another record in the relay.

That earned her a spot on Canada's World University Games team and won gold in the 100-metre backstroke with a time of 59.97.

"The biggest breakthrough, on the international stage, was when she won that gold," said Varsity Blues assistant head coach Linda Kiefer, who will be part of Canada's coaching staff for swimming at the Olympics.

"She realized she could play with the big girls."

Competing with the big girls is one thing, but being known as one of the big girls is another.

“She’s new to all of this,” Kiefer said. “She doesn’t get how special she is and that’s good.”

Kiefer and Semenov credit Masse’s parents, Cindy and Louie, for that humbleness.

“Her parents are amazing,” Kiefer said. “They’re so laid back and low key, but they’re there for her.”

Cindy Masse said talk around the house isn’t all about swimming.

“We don’t talk about swimming outside the pool,” she said. “Just because you win doesn’t make you a better person. Whatever happens, it’s back to reality the next day.”

Kylie came back this year to earn Canadian Interuniversity Sport female swimmer of the year after sweeping the 50-, 100- and 200-metre backstroke events while setting new CIS marks in all three events.



Swimmer Kylie Masse, of LaSalle, has qualified for the 2016 Summer Olympics.

*MARTIN BAZYL / WINDSOR STAR*

While she sees her daughter's talents, Cindy Masse has no real explanation for her prowess in the pool.

"I didn't see it coming," she said. "I don't think anybody saw it coming. I'm as shocked as the next person. She's a hard worker, but lots of kids are hard workers. She's had some success, but lots of others have had success. I can't explain it.

"She's just very competitive when the whistle goes and it kind of catches you off guard, because she's not like that regularly."

Being in the pool for a 6:30 a.m. practice doesn't phase her and neither does having to practice eight or nine times a week along with two or three weightlifting workouts.

"There's talent, but she comes in to a workout and she's happy," Kiefer said. "She likes what we're doing. If you ever sneak in and watch a workout, she's laughing and dancing. She's enjoying it."

Last week was Masse's second time competing at the Canadian Olympic Trials and she has vivid memories from 2012.

"I was younger and less experienced," said Masse, who will also compete on Canada's 4×100-metre medley relay team in Brazil. "I remember the last trials I got pictures with Julia Wilkinson and Ryan Cochrane (who had already represented Canada at previous Olympics). It's different now, I'm more mature and experienced racing."

Masse has now become that idol for other swimmers. One is WEST's Rachel Rode, who won OFSAA gold in the open girls' 50-metre freestyle in record time in March and is set to join the Varsity Blues in the fall.

"I'm excited to join her next year," Rode said of Masse.

The two swam together for years at WEST, but Masse just smiles hearing Rode's words.

“It’s awesome and it feels really good for someone to say that,” Masse said.

For now, she is happy to slip back into anonymity finishing her exams as a kinesiology major and getting ready to compete for Canada in the pool.

“It’s nice fitting into class like everyone else,” said Masse, who is still getting used to being called an Olympian. “It’s super cool and super exciting. Now that I know I’ve made the team and swam the time, I can sit down and set some goals.”

[jpparker@postmedia.com](mailto:jpparker@postmedia.com) (mailto:jpparker@postmedia.com)

[twitter.com/winstarparker](https://twitter.com/winstarparker) (https://twitter.com/winstarparker)

## Windsor Flyers



## Comments

We encourage all readers to share their views on our articles and blog posts. We are committed to maintaining a lively but civil forum for discussion, so we ask you to avoid personal attacks, and please keep your comments relevant and respectful. If you encounter a comment that is abusive, click the "X" in the upper right corner of the comment box to report spam or abuse. We are using Facebook commenting. Visit our FAQ page (facebook-commenting-faqs) for more information.

1 Comment

Sort by **Newest**



Add a comment...



**Jennie Berkeley** · Windsor, Ontario

Congratulations to you, Kylie, and your parents, and to your West coaches, Andrei, Lou, et al. !!!

With all best wishes for the 2016 Olympics!!!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Apr 22, 2016 4:43pm

([HTTP://WWW.POSTMEDIA.COM](http://www.postmedia.com))

© 2016 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.

Powered by WordPress.com VIP (<https://vip.wordpress.com/>)