Victoria-based triathlete Joanna Brown wins Canada's first medal at Commonwealth Games

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Joanna Brown of Canada celebrates after receiving her bronze medal in the women's triathlon at Southport Broadwater Parklands in the 2018 Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast, Australia, Thursday, April 5, 2018. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

The National Triathlon Training Centre in Victoria, established last year, recorded its first international multi-sport Games success of the post-Simon Whitfield era.

Joanna Brown of Carp, Ont., who took a big gamble by relocating her life to live and train at the centre, won Canada's first medal of the 2018 Commonwealth Games by taking bronze in Gold Coast, Australia.

It was Canada's fourth medal in Commonwealth Games triathlon, following Victorian Whitfield's men's gold and Carol Montgomery's women's gold at 2002 in Manchester, and Victoria racer Kirsten Sweetland's women's silver at Glasgow in 2014.

Brown overcame a fractured shoulder, incurred in the Abu Dhabi ITU World Series Race on March 2, to reach the podium. It was touch-and-go, with Brown in pain right up until arriving in Gold Coast. But with funding help from 94 Forward, the $20-million legacy training fund from the 1994 Victoria Commonwealth Games, the national-team triathletes have been surrounded by top-level medical, training, coaching and nutritional support.

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"There are no words to describe this feeling right now," Brown told Neil Davidson of the Canadian Press.

"It has been the most chaotic month, with fracturing my shoulder, but I have had the most incredible team of doctors and physiotherapists and coaches who have helped me a lot."

Triathlon was the first athletic event of the Games after the opening ceremony, which took place in the early morning hours of Wednesday PDT.

The result was reminiscent of the 2014 Commonwealth Games, in which now-retired Islander Sweetland won Canada's first medal by striking women's silver in Glasgow.

Events in the Commonwealth Games can be hit or miss in terms of athletic depth. But the triathlon is top-drawer, featuring five of the world's top 10 competitors on the women's side, including world No. 1 Flora Duffy of Bermuda, world No. 2 and hometown Gold Coast athlete Ashleigh Gentle of Australia and 2016 Rio Olympics bronze medallist Vicky Holland of England.

Through this brutal field, Brown had an outstanding sprint home to the podium in 57:38:00, which was 48 seconds behind winner Duffy and 43 seconds behind silver medallist Jessica Learmonth of England. Holland was fourth and Gentle fifth.

For 18-year-old Desirae Ridenour of Cowichan Bay, considered the next thing in Canadian triathlon, this was about the next time. She finished 17th in her senior Games debut in 1:03:46. Dominika Jamnicky of Canada was 14th in 1:01:08.

Included on the Commonwealth Games team are Brown, Ridenour, Jamnicky, Matt Sharpe of Victoria, 2016 Olympian Tyler Mislawchuk of Oak Bluff, Man., and Alexis Lepage of Gatineau, Que. Four of those six train at the national performance centre.

Sharpe, Mislawchuk and Lepage were up against the fabulous Brownlee brothers of England, who have dominated this era of world triathlon, in the Commonwealth Games men's race.

The Brownlees, slowed by injuries, faded as 2016 Rio Olympics bronze-medallist Henri Schoeman of South Africa won in 52:31. Claremont grad Sharpe was top Canadian in ninth place in 53:34.

Fifty-two athletes from the Island are competing in the Gold Coast Games.

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