

Salem's Walker competing at Junior World Championships for Great Britain national softball team

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By Mac Cerullo mcerullo@eagletribune.com

SALEM -- Every athlete dreams of representing their country in competition, and this week Niamh Walker of Salem has had the rare privilege of taking the diamond adorned in red, white and blue.

Just not the red, white and blue you might expect.

Walker, a junior pitcher at Central Catholic, is competing at the Junior Women's Softball World Championships in Oklahoma City as a member of the Great Britain U-19 national team. Walker holds dual citizenship between the United States and the United Kingdom and was one of four American players selected to the team.

Though most people think of softball as an inherently American sport, Walker said she's found that the level of competition around the world is quite impressive, and that a lot of other countries employ unique strategies that can be difficult if you haven't seen them before.



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Courtesy PhotoNiamh Walker of Salem fires in a pitch while competing as part of the Great Britain U-19 national team at the Junior Women's Softball World Championships in Oklahoma City.



TIM JEAN/Staff photo

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TIM JEAN/Staff Photo Central's Niamh Walker winds up to throw a pitch in relief against Medford player during the MIAA Division 1 Softball Semifinal game in Lowell. This past week, Walker has been competing in the Junior Women's Softball World Championship in Oklahoma City with the Great Britain team.

"It's a lot different, especially because they all speak different languages. It's cool to interact with people from all these countries," Walker said. "Compared to school ball and travel ball, it's a lot quicker, and there's more small ball. They have different techniques about how to get on base and get into people's heads."

Walker joined the Great Britain team last year after she was tipped off to the idea by her pitching coach Megan Biddle, a former UConn great now working out of Play Ball in Salisbury. The pair emailed the coaching staff and sent over a video, and before long the coaches responded and offered her a spot on the U-16 team.

Since then, Walker has had a chance to join the Great Britain team twice in European competition. Her first international experience came last year when she competed in the Netherlands, and then earlier this year she went back overseas to play in Italy.

In both of those cases, Walker was the one playing in an unfamiliar environment, but now the shoe is on the other foot as Walker is the one helping her British teammates get a feel for American culture.

"They're loving it, they think it's so cool," Walker said, adding that their favorite American staples so far seem to be the food and the shopping.

Though Great Britain started the tournament off strong with back-to-back wins over Colombia and Argentina, the team went on lose its next four to New Zealand, Japan, Canada and China, finishing the round robin stage 2-4 and out of the running for a medal.



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Niamh Walker.

Cultural Exchange

Having lots of family still living in the United Kingdom, Niamh Walker has had plenty of exposure to the British culture, and in her opinion the biggest difference between New England and the UK is that people over there tend to be nicer.

As for her British teammates, she said they've quickly taken to the American culture, particularly the food.

"They like the junk food that we have," she said. "We took them to Walmart and they thought that was great too."