

*"Losers quit when  
they're tired.  
Winners quit when  
they've won."*

Mike Ditka

# The Niagara Sporting Green

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Crazy meets crazy  
as January hands  
John Swart a warm  
weekend

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## Canada calls on Koabel

Port Colborne's Emma Koabel, right, in action with the Niagara Prep squad that competes in the Ontario Scholastic Basketball Association.

BERNIE PUCHALSKI PHOTO

### Port teen eyes spot with national hoops

Niagara Prep head coach Dave Picton describes Emma Koabel as arguably one of the best 2022 graduating guards in the country.

Canada Basketball seems to be in agreement with this assessment after it invited the 15-year-old Port Colborne resident to attend a December tryout for Canada's under-17 team, which will play in a tournament this summer in Romania. Koabel is currently waiting to hear if she has advanced to the next level of tryouts after attending the first stage in mid-December.

The former Lakeshore Catholic student was over the moon when she received the email inviting her to take part in the tryout.

"I was so thrilled and I immediately told my parents about the email," the former Team Ontario

BY BERNIE PUCHALSKI  
BPSPORTSNIAGARA.COM

member said. "It was awesome."

The invitation is the latest in the blossoming career of a teen who was in Grade 7 when she set a goal of playing NCAA Division 1 basketball.

"I have had that goal for a long time and especially since seeing all the Grade 12s on our team getting scholarships to the States and even Canadian schools," the 5-foot-10 guard said. "It is really motivating to me and has shown me that it is possible."

Her short-term goal is team-oriented.

"This year, my goal and our goal is to take the OSBA (Ontario Scholastic Basketball Association) championship and really

working as a team to get to that position," she said. "We want to get to the championship game and see what happens."

In her first year of OSBA play, Koabel has played well. Through the team's first 12 games, she was tied for second in scoring average (12.5), led the team in steals per game (3.8) and was fifth in rebounds per game (3.4).

Picton feels she exhibits basketball IQ beyond her years and describes her as one of the best three-point shooters in the OSBA.

"She is a player I trust to shoot the big shot, but more importantly she trusts herself to shoot the big shot," he said. "She is an identified national athlete now and needs to continue to build her strength, defensive footwork in the half court and be ready to

lead Niagara Prep next year."

She agrees with Picton's assessment.

"I have to get stronger, which will let me be more physical with my game and allow me to bring my game to the next level on both offense and defence."

Koabel had no problem leaving her home school to join the OSBA program at A. N. Myer.

"I knew I was going to have an awesome opportunity like this one, and I also knew that my game was going to grow a lot because of the girls that I would be playing with," she said. "Just playing with older and more experienced girls, I knew I that it was going to help me improve a lot."

She is enjoying all the perks that come with suiting up for the team, including playing a showcase tournament in New York City.

"It's a really cool opportunity,"

she said. "I have been getting to travel a lot with this team lately."

It didn't take long before she fit in at Niagara Prep.

"It took a couple of weeks to get used to everything — all the practices and all the training — but it's worth it. It is really fun."

On the court, she had to get used to playing at the next level.

"I am playing against Grade 12s, so they are stronger and have had more training than me. It was adjusting and learning how to use my strength when I play against stronger girls."

She didn't expect to have the degree of success she has had in her rookie OSBA season.

"I do surprise myself sometimes, but it's probably just because I have been letting loose and my teammates are really supporting of me," she said. "We have a really great team community so they help bring the best out of me."