

World championship debut bittersweet for Amihere

Canada's quarterfinal defeat "devastating," but local teen pleased with her personal performance

By Steve LeBlanc
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Laetitia Amihere glances up at the clock, and a split second later — with no time remaining and a mass of flailing bodies under the net — snags a loose ball and blindly heaves it up at the net.

"I saw we were out of time, so I couldn't really gather it up and think about it. Everyone was in the key... it was crazy," recalled the 6-foot-3 Milton forward of the nail-biting finish to the June 29 FIBA Under-17 World Championship quarterfinals in Zaragoza, Spain. "But yeah, it was a shot I could have made."

Not an easy admission, given the 58-56 heart-breaker suffered at the hands of the eventual silver medalist Italians, who'd just recently eclipsed them on a buzzer beater in exhibition play. The world championship rematch saw Canada draw within a basket of Italy four

times in the final quarter before being vanquished.

"We had such a talented team and knew we deserved to win," noted Amihere, whose Canadians went on to place seventh — beating France 58-53 in the classification game July 2. "It was devastating."

But Milton's newest basketball standout — who moved to town from Mississauga in January — gained plenty of confidence from her world championship debut.

And for good reason.

As the youngest member of Team Canada and one of just a handful of 2001-born players at the 15-team tournament — who only turned 15 on Sunday (July 10) — Amihere wasn't even sure she'd be a regular starter in Spain.

She didn't just secure that role, but finished atop the team — and in a couple of cases the entire international field — in every major category.

Her 78 total rebounds and 20 blocks put her first for the tournament, while she tied for eighth overall in points-per-game (12.5) and sixth in assists per game (1.8).

"It (world championships) helped my development a lot... seeing that intensity and level of competition," said Amihere, who



Laetitia Amihere goes up for a shot against Mexico during the U17 world championships. Photo courtesy of FIBA

helped Canada capture gold last summer at the Americas U16 tournament and this past fall — as a high school freshman — led King's

Christian Collegiate of Oakville to OFSAA 'AA' supremacy.

A somewhat late starter to competitive basketball — in her Grade 7 year — the local standout led the Brampton Warriors to an unbeaten season and the JUEL league championship this past spring.

Amihere was particularly productive in the world championships' preliminary round, netting 20 points and 16 rebounds against Japan and 18 points and 21 rebounds versus Latvia.

She now joins fellow Miltonian Lauren Boers on Team Ontario's U17 team for the remainder of the summer, with high-end U.S. tournaments and the national championships in Regina on this month's slate.

"That'll be great," said Amihere, one of the country's top ranked players for the class of 2019, who's now in her third year with the provincial program — having claimed national gold with Boers last summer and silver in 2014. "Lauren and I know each other really well and she was great with the team last year."

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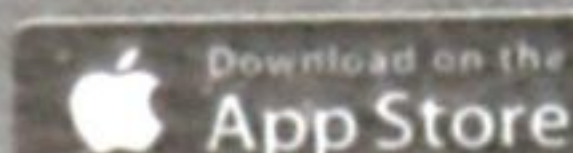
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