

THE OBSERVER | SATURDAY, MAY 24, 2014

SPORTS

BASKETBALL / HIGH SCHOOL

Conestogo girl recognized for academic and athletic prowess

A student at Woodland Christian High School, Juliana Thomson has an eye on U.S. basketball scholarship

▶ SCOTT BARBER

WHEN YOU FIRST MEET

Woodland Christian High School student Juliana Thomson, it's difficult to picture the fierce, intimidating power forward of a provincial champion basketball team. Sure, she's tall for a 10th grader - nearly 6'2" - but a more articulate and polite teen you won't find.

She's no Dennis Rodman or Charles Oakley, off the court at least.

In fact, the Conestogo resident strikes the balance between school and sports so well she won the Molten all-academic athlete award, an honour given to members of the Junior Elite (Juel) basketball league who demonstrate excellence in both fields. Thomson fits the bill.

"I really enjoy math and science," she said, sitting in the office outside her school's brand new gym. "If I get the opportunity, I'd love to go to the United States to play basketball and study medicine."

The NCAA is the holy grail for talented young athletes in Canada, with its combination of state-of-the-art facilities, premier skill-level and potential for full scholarships. It takes a lot of work to get noticed,

particularly outside of the major cities. But the KW Lightning basketball program and the Juel league provide young women like Thomson the chance to gain attention south of the border.

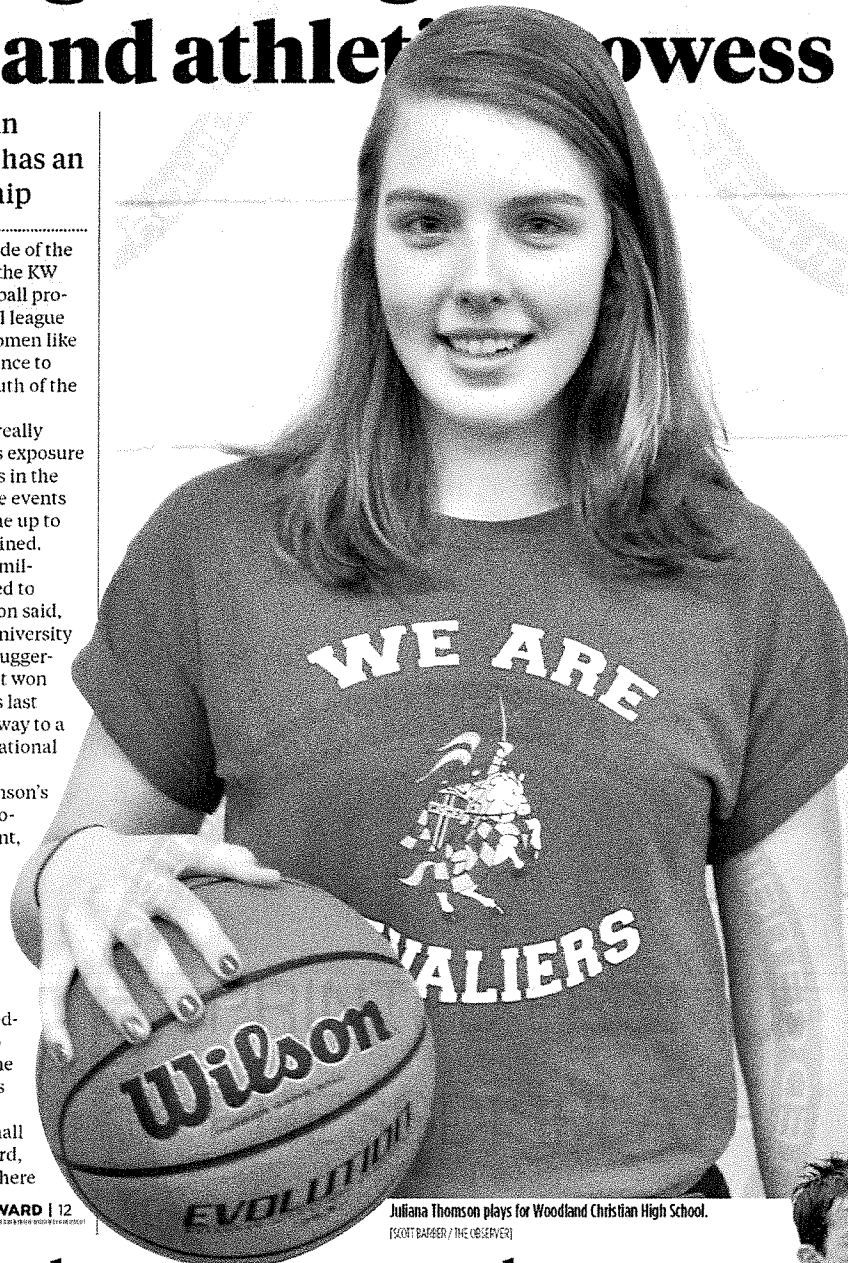
"The league is really good at getting us exposure with tournaments in the U.S. and showcase events where scouts come up to watch," she explained.

"A girl from Hamilton just committed to UCONN," Thomson said, referring to the University of Connecticut's juggernaut program that won 40 straight games last season on its way to a second straight national championship.

Last year, Thomson's squad won the provincial tournament, qualifying for the Junior National Championships at the ESPN Wide World of Sports facility in Orlando, Florida.

"It was an incredible experience to go up against some of the best players in America," she said. "I'm a bit small for a power forward, especially down there

AWARD | 12



Juliana Thomson plays for Woodland Christian High School. (SCOTT BARBER / THE OBSERVER)

AWARD: Success in the classroom, on the court

FROM | 11

where some of the girls are 6'5". But that helps me learn how to use my body in different ways to compete and be physical."

The hard work this season culminated with an invitation to the all-star game, which tips off at Ryerson's Mattamy Athletic Centre on May 24.

Outside of rep basketball, Thomson finds time to play on the school volleyball,

badminton and senior level basketball teams, and was recently elected student athletic director.

It's a great deal of achievement for a young woman who only moved to Conestogo (from Cambridge) shortly before starting Grade 9. She modestly attributes the success to her coaches and teachers.

"Everyone at the school wants you to succeed in the classroom and in sports,"

Thomson said. "I'm fortunate to be in such a welcoming environment. Being a smaller school, you get to know everyone in different grades so quickly."

The ball continues at tournaments in Illinois and Kentucky with the KW Lightning's summer team, coached by former Ontario University Association standout and European professional Kerri Jilesen.