

[By Brian McNair](#)

WHITBY -- One is off to Boston College.

Two others will head a fair bit farther south, to Florida, to study and play the game they've grown to love.

Another yet will head off the Pacific coast to beautiful Hawaii to pursue her opportunity of a lifetime.

And, amazingly, that's just four of the nine members of the Whitby Eagles Girls' Rep Fastball Association who have earned scholarships to continue playing the game south of the border.

Yes, you read that right, nine players from two of the program's Midget-aged team, will pack up their gloves and cleats for the United States next week.

Three come from the team coached by former Toronto Blue Jay Rob Butler: Ali Lynette Krech is going to Boston College, Kelly Blea to Winthrop University in South Carolina and Alycia Wodzak to Chaminade University in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Six more yet come from the team coached by Bert Harris that represented Ontario at the national championships earlier this month.

They are Mackenzie Brooks, University of Maine; Michel [redacted] ood University in West Palm Beach Florida; Cassandra Fitzgerald Black, Holy Family University in Philadelphia; Shann Burke, Winthrop University in South Carolina; Courtney Rzepka, Glenville State University in West Virginia; Kayla MacLean, Miami Dade College in Florida.

"I think it's commitment, love of the game and respect of the game," explains Rosemary Theriault, an executive director with the Eagles. "I think that's what's driven these kids."

Theriault should know. The 56-year-old Whitby Sports Hall of Famer has been involved with softball for 31 years and was one of the Eagles founding members in 1995.

She's seen more than 50 players graduate from the Eagles to a post-secondary scholarship, including her daughter, Michelle, who earned three degrees, including a masters, while in Tennessee.

And, yes, Olympians too have been nurtured in Whitby.

Whitby's own Erin McLean made her way through the system, while her current Olympic teammate Megan Timpf of Port Dover also spent a year with the Eagles.

"We're trying to promote the game at an elite level and our success shows that it is an elite level," Theriault says. "The youth are the future of our province and our town. We have to invest in them in order for that to come back. And they will be our leaders."

Not surprisingly, the two midget teams fared very well this season, with the Harris squad finishing second and Butler third at the Provincial Championships. Krech, of Team Butler, won the top batter award, while Maria Greco, a Team Harris member already on scholarship, won top pitcher honours.

Theriault attributes the success of the program to a number of factors, including cooperation from the Town of Whitby and between the Eagles and other associations such as the Whitby Girls' Softball Association and Whitby Minor Baseball Association.

But mostly due to the commitment and loyalty from within.

"There's a lot of associations out there where you bring the kids up to, say, Novice or Bantam, and the grass all of a sudden looks greener and they think they want to go over," she says. "But these kids have stayed loyal and the parents have stayed loyal to the association and have bought into the fact we're trying to promote the game."

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