

# Local coaches put to the test at national tournaments

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"We had one weekend with some of the girls in Bendigo where they had a camp as part of the State Performance Program," she said.

"But some of the players I had never seen before, so it was a challenge for me and for them.

"You only get two 90 minute sessions of training before it all starts, so that's not much time to get them playing as a team.

"But because we had the basics of the academy program that they all knew, you can go from there, and by about the second or third game they

were pulling together and playing as a team really well."

Meanwhile, Jacqui's daughter Emma Henry attended the Southern Cross Challenge in Ballarat as coach of the under 14 girls Goldminers.

"The first day we played both Vic Metro sides, so it was a very tough start to the tournament," Emma said.

"We lost the first one by 10 points and the second one by two, so they did a great job considering the metro teams train for six weeks beforehand, and we only had one training session the day before.

"I was absolutely rapt that they

got that close, because a lot of these girls had never even met before, so to come out and click like they did was just fantastic.

"And every other game after that they won, so they did a really good job."

Fellow Warriors mentor Andrew Storer was assistant coach of the under 14 girls Bushrangers at the Country Cup, and it was an experience he is hoping to repeat in the future.

"I really enjoyed it and learnt a lot," Storer said.

"I guess the thing that I enjoyed the most was having the opportunity to speak to a lot of other young coaches

day in and day out for seven days.

"Just chewing the fat, sharing ideas and knowledge, being with a lot of other likeminded people with a passion for basketball – that was great.

"This was the first time I've been to the Country Cup, so it was a new experience for me, and one that I really enjoyed.

"I learnt a lot from the head coach, and also from the mentor coach, who was good enough to speak to all of the assistant coaches as well.

"We got a lot of feedback on how the team was performing, what they needed to do and what

we needed to do better.

"I'm confident now that it's the sort of thing I'd be capable of doing again, and I might look at being a head coach in future."

Tom Thorn was an assistant coach with the under 14 boys Bushrangers at Albury, and he relished the opportunity to soak up the knowledge of his peers.

"It was great to meet so many high end coaches and learn from them," Thorn said.

"And the team played really well, finishing equal fourth overall with a number of very close losses."

# Top of the crop

By SCOTT ANDERSON

FOUR of Wangaratta's rising basketball stars were involved in major tournaments at Ballarat and Albury recently, representing Victoria Country against some of the best teams from throughout Australia and New Zealand.

Jack Jenkin played for the under 15 Vic Country Goldminers at Ballarat's Southern Cross Challenge, where his side won two of six matches.

"We played Western Australia Country first and smashed them," Jenkin said.

"Then we played a couple more games and got beaten, and it ended up we had to play Western Australia Country again at the end.

"We just won that one – we didn't play as well in that game.

"We also played against Vic Metro, South Australia Metro, South Australia Country and Western Australia Metro.

"We went okay – we always knew Vic Metro were going to be really good, and the other games were all pretty close."

Jenkin had a ball at the tournament, but said there was plenty of hard work involved.

"I played point guard and shooting guard, and I thought I played alright," he said.

"We were coached by Rebel Noter from Warrnambool – he was really good.

"We played two games each day, so it was pretty exhausting – you didn't really notice it until you got in the car and fell asleep.

"The best part was meeting new people and playing at a higher competition."

Liam Wright also attended the Southern Cross Challenge, representing the under 15 Vic Country Bushrangers, who won one game and lost five.

"The only game we won was against ACT, but the others were all close, except for the game against Vic Metro," Wright said.

"We were going alright in the first half, but then they just started to play much



STAR QUARTET: Wangaratta basketballers (from left) Harri Smart, Jack Jenkin, Liam Wright and Carly Perso took part in the recent Southern Cross Challenge and Country Cup tournaments.

PHOTO: Scott Anderson

better – they beat us easily.

"We played really well against SA Metro – everything just seemed to work for us until the end, when we just cracked under the pressure and lost by three points.

"The other games were all around five points – we should have won most of them."

Wright enjoyed himself despite the lack of success on court, and took some new knowledge away from the tournament.

"I didn't go too well on the first day, because I felt like I didn't have to do as much because I had so many good players on my team," he said.

"The next day I started trying to do a bit more, and that's when I felt like I started to play alright.

"I learnt a bit of defen-

sive stuff and some shooting techniques, so it was good."

Harri Smart spent a week in Albury at the Country Cup, playing for the under 14 Vic Country Goldminers, who finished with three wins and five losses.

"We should have won an extra two or three of the games, but we just started playing bad in the last quarter," Smart said.

"Most of the games were really close.

"Both the New South Wales teams were really good – they both got into the final.

"We also played against South Australia, Western Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania and Albury/Wodonga had their own team."

Smart suffered an ankle injury during the tournament, but that didn't tarnish his experience.

"I played well against Tassie, but halfway through I hurt my ankle," he said.

"There were two games left after that – I played, but it was still pretty sore.

"As a team I thought we played our best against New Zealand – we beat them.

"Overall it was really good – I had a great time.

"We stayed at The Scots School in Albury, and the food was really good there."

Carly Perso was also at the Country Cup, playing for the under 18 girls Vic Country Goldminers.

"We went really well – we finished in second place overall," Perso said.

"We lost the grand final by 20 points to the Victorian Bushrangers team.

"All the players bonded quickly, and I thought we played together as a team really well.

"Overall it was awesome – I had so much fun."

Since representing Vic Country at the Basketball Australia Junior National Championships six months ago, Perso has had a wretched run with injuries, and her bad luck continued in Albury.

"I went alright, but halfway through the week I had to go to hospital after hurting my shoulder," she said.

"I hyper-extended it, and that was on the Thursday, two days before the grand final, which wasn't good.

"I missed the games on the Friday, but played a little bit of the grand final.

"I had the Australian camp up at the AIS (Australian Institute of Sport) the week after, and I redid it up there, so I just had to take a couple of weeks off."

## Barker leads Goldminers to third place

By SCOTT ANDERSON

WANDILIGONG basketballer Jalen Barker had a memorable experience at the recent Southern Cross Challenge, leading the under 14 Victoria Country Goldminers to third place in the nation.

The tournament, staged in Ballarat from January 19-22, featured some of Australia's best young basketballers in country and metropolitan teams from Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.

Barker, who has been plying his trade in Melbourne for the past couple of seasons with Victorian Junior Basketball League heavyweight Nunawading Spectres, was made captain of the Goldminers under 14 side in his second year representing Victoria Country.

The side was thrown in at the deep end, facing the two Victorian Metro teams first up, and while they lost both matches, Barker said the games provided a valuable learning experience.

"We had never played as a team before so against the metro sides we didn't really know each other very well," he said.

"But by the third game we all started to gel much better as a team."

The Goldminers went on to win their next four matches to finish the tournament in third place overall.

"The best win was beating the other Vic Country team (the Bushrangers)," Barker said.

"It was our third game and who ever won got their first win.

"We won by one point.

"The two metro sides were very good so to finish third was great."

Barker played some outstanding basketball throughout the tournament, and was more than satisfied with his performance.

"I think I played consistent games," he said.

"But I could have improved by staying out of foul trouble, other than that I think I played really well.

"Being the captain of the team was a surprise and an honor."

While basketball matches, practice and clinics took up the majority of the four days the tournament was held over, Barker said there was also time to socialise and relax.

"It was really fun and the basketball was great," he said.

"I made lots of new friends and hope to get to go again next year."

In the meantime, Barker has his sights set on guiding Nunawading into the National Championships, with the new VJBL season starting last Friday.

"I'll continue to work hard with my Nunawading side this year to try and make the Nationals and the (state) championship," he said.