

# SWSA News

## Athletes Gain Clean Sports Advantage

Olympic and Commonwealth Games Gymnast Ashleigh Brennan spoke to Academy Athletes on the importance of staying Clean in Sport.

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## BMX Riding Towards State Success

The 'Bounce Back Physiotherapy' BMX Squad athletes pedal hard and fly high at their recent camp, refining their skills ready to show off at the upcoming round 5 state championships

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## Academy Games a Win For Spectators

The ClubsNSW Regional Academy Games ventured back to Wagga Wagga, where the hosts Southern Sports Academy provided a spectator friendly environment.

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# SWSAS News



*SWSAS News is proudly produced in-house by the South West Sydney Academy of Sport for our South West Sydney community.*

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**Cover Image:** Ryder Nicholson in action  
during a recent BMX State Titles round.  
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## From the CEO's Desk

After twelve years in opposition, we now have a Labor Government in power; and the Academy congratulates all of its Academy region re-elected, and newly elected Members of Parliament, whatever their party.

A special congratulations go to current Academy Board Member Charisma Kaliyanda MP in her election success as the State Member for Liverpool; and also, past long serving Academy Board Member Judy Hannan MP as the newly elected State Member for Wollondilly and the Southern Highlands.

We also welcome The Hon. Steve Kamper MP, as the incoming NSW Minister for Sport.

Regional Academies of Sport (NSW) has and will continue to work extremely hard to develop strong direct and positive relationships with the incumbent NSW Minister for Sport and the Minister's Office, for the betterment of all Regional Academies, their athletes and coaching and support staff members.

This type of positive relationship is seen by all parties, as the foundation for the development of our future sporting stars.

### Academy Games

The 2023 'Your Local Club' Academy Games was recently, successfully held across the Wagga Wagga region. And I am pleased to report that all the hard work put in by our Academy athletes, coaches, and support staff members, was definitely reflected in the Academy's much publicised, amazing individual and team performances and results.

As always, we must remember that Academy success is due to the work of many, starting from coaches and trainers at the club and school level, through to our association and regional supporters, and our highly generous corporate sponsors.

The Academy is proud to be one, but important stepping stone in the development pathway of our local athletes, in support of their sporting 'Dreams'.

We look forward to seeing many of these fine athletes join our large contingency of past alumni, when it is their turn to perform at the highest level of their chosen sport. With some hopefully representing Australia in its home Olympic and Paralympic Games, in Brisbane in 2032.

In conclusion I take this opportunity once again to thank our Academy 'naming rights' partner the Campbelltown Catholic Club, and our Platinum Partner South32, plus our region's local Councils and all of our corporate partners, who continue to see excellent community value, in supporting the Academy.

Thank you, one and all.



**Gerry Knights**  
CEO



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## Athletes Gain Clean Sport Advantage

Throughout mid-April, our Academy athletes, coaches and parents had the privilege of attending a Drugs in Sport seminar, led by Sport Integrity Australia, as a part of the athletes education program, held at the Academy's Official Education Partner, Western Sydney University Campbelltown Campus.

The Academy was fortunate enough to have former Australian Olympic and Commonwealth Games Gymnast Ashleigh Brennan, present the session, which focused not only on providing education around clean sport, but highlight the impact that illicit drugs have had on performance.

Brennan was a member of the Australian Gymnastics team that participated in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, finishing sixth in the Artistic Gymnast category. This achievement capped off a tremendous run, following her teams Gold medal winning performances at the 2006, and 2010 Commonwealth games.

Brennan was then selected to represent Australia at the 2012 London Olympics, where the Australian team qualified in tenth. Brennan later retired and has since earned a career in sports science.

The seminar began with an overview of the historical context of drugs in sport, exploring substances where doping scandals have marred the reputation of sports, coaches, athletes and their families.

Brennan continued by delving into the multifaceted issues surrounding the use of performance-enhancing substances ranging from the risk athletes take when they consume an everyday protein shake with unspecified ingredients to the consequences of their career if they return a positive test result.





The role in which technology plays in ensuring fair play and the ethical considerations surrounding that sparked a genuine interest of attendees in the room.

Brennan provided the athletes with helpful resources to ensure safe and clean competition through the Sport Integrity Australia App and insisted how important it is for athletes to know what they are consuming.

The app is an added layer of knowledge to try and educate the Australian sporting community to know what they are consuming.

The event fostered a sense of awareness, encouraging athletes, coaches and parents to actively contribute to the promotion of clean competition on the preservation of the integrity of sports in prospective years.

### *Ashleigh's Clean Sport Tips*

Educate yourself! Download the Sport Integrity App and do the Clean Sport 101 Course. The App is a good resource to use to check if something has been tested ie supplements. Clean Sport applies to not just athletes, but Coaches and Parents as well. YOU have the responsibility to know what you are putting into YOUR body.

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# ATHLETES TAKE THE LEAD AT COME AND TRY DAY

South32 Illawarra Metallurgical Coal and the South West Sydney Academy of Sport joined forces during the April school holidays, as athletes from the Academy took the lead in hosting a Community Come and Try Sports Day at the Douglas Park Oval.

Although the weather was a bit touch and go, it failed to deter many local residents who turned up to try a number of sports throughout the morning.

The athletic ability of those in attendance on display, as attested to by the local Picton Rotary Club, who kept all in attendance fueled up on their famous Rotary Sausage Sizzle.

With such a great turn out for the first Come and Try day, there sure is a strong future for Australian sport within our local region. And with the ongoing support of Academy Platinum Partner South32 Illawarra Metallurgical Coal, there are already discussions underway for the Academy to host more school-holiday sports clinic's across the South West Sydney region in the near future.

Academy sport program athletes Jade Dabrowski (Basketball), Sophie Connor (Basketball), Max Brown-Tjakuapi (Basketball),



Alexis Paulo (AFLW) and Blessing Donvenekham (Netball) loved the opportunity to share their sport with the local community.

Each taking the opportunity to put their coaching hat on and pass on the knowledge they have learned whilst within the Academy program, teaching foundational skills in Basketball, AFL, Long Jump and Netball and had an absolute ball.

The Academy also appreciated the support and help of local sporting organisations Douglas Park Little Athletics, Wollondilly Razorbacks Basketball Association, Wollondilly Redbacks Junior AFL, Douglas Park Netball, the Picton Rotary Club, and fellow Academy Partners Sharp Extensive IT, Bingara Gorge and Aceit.





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# RAS HOST INAUGURAL ATHLETE AWARDS NIGHT

It was a night of celebration and recognition for Regional Academies of Sport athletes and coaches, when all eleven Regional Academies of Sport from across New South Wales came together to celebrate and recognise the achievements of our athletes and coaches across five award categories.

Each winner was selected from nominations received from across the Regional Academies of Sport in NSW network. The categories and winners were:

- Athlete of the Year – Alesha Bennets (Athletics), Western Region Academy of Sport
- Athlete Leadership – Mia Parker (LoneStar / Water Polo), Illawarra Academy of Sport
- Coach Leadership – Robyn Low Hart (Triathlon), Central Coast Academy of Sport
- Indigenous Athlete of the Year – Telaya Blacksmith (Athletics, AFL), Illawarra Academy of Sport
- AWD (Athlete with Disability) of the Year – Josh Hanlon (Para Alpine Skiing), Southern Sports Academy

The Inaugural Award's dinner, proudly supported by Steadfast Group Limited and Underwriting Agencies of Australia Pty Ltd (UAA); and co-hosted by the Western Sydney Academy of Sport and South West Sydney Academy of Sport, was a heralded success.

The RAS are grateful to have the support of Wenty Leagues Club, for its great hospitality and contribution to the night. Another big thank you to the State Sporting Organisations (SSO's) who attended and supported the local athletes and coaches for their hard work.



The Regional Academies continue to represent an extensive geographic areas across NSW, with over 100 Local Government Areas and support services provided for over 2,000 athletes, and 300 coaching and program staff.

The Regional Academies of Sport (RAS) network also continues to grow in recognition and significance, across a wide range of organisations, such as the NSW Government, the NSW Institute of Sport, Paralympics Australia, and State Sporting Organisations, as we head towards Australia's 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games.

A big thank you to our honoured guests, which included the Minister for Sport Alister Henskens SC MP and representatives from our major stakeholders, athletes, parents and staff from our Regional Academies.

And congratulations to all nominees and winners across the Regional Academies of Sport network, with a special mention to our South West Sydney Academy of Sport Finalists in their respective categories.) Kaden Smith (AWD), Kai Allie (Indigenous), Van Nguyen (Coach Leadership), Thomas Noakes (Athlete Leadership) and Ryan Carter (Athlete of the Year).

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## Academy Games A Win For Spectators

An estimated 1000 of the state's finest young athletes across seven sports, and from the eleven NSW Regional Academies of Sport headed to the Wagga Wagga Region in late April for the 2023 Clubs NSW Your Local Club Regional Academy Games.

Hosted by the Southern Sports Academy, the event was held across various venues throughout the Wagga Wagga region for the second of three years, after previously hosted by the Hunter Academy of Sport.

"With the new PCYC available for basketball, and the opportunity to host Basketball, Volleyball and Triathlon all within the Bolton Park precinct the Games showcased some of the state's best athletes in the centre of Wagga. Which provided an amazing opportunity for many of our athletes to perform on their home stage." said host Academy CEO, Mark Calverly.

"We have been fortunate to have the event for three years and each year we aim to build on the last." he added.

This year's Regional Academy Games generated an estimated 6228 bed stays in the region with a total economic tourism value of around the \$2m mark.

With the number of key team sports being held in close proximity, and a triathlon course that was set up with all three components within metres of each other, the 2023 Regional Academy Games was dubbed by many as the "Spectator Games", where no spectator had a bad seat, and could watch all the action, on all courts and in surrounding streets, at the same time.

Not bad when you consider the number of Basketball, Cycling, Golf, Hockey, Netball, Triathlon and Indoor Volleyball games that were contested over the three days.

The 2023 event also coincided with the exciting news that ClubsNSW have extended its partnership with RASi for a further two years – with further investment in the Your Local Club Academy Games and the RASi Annual Awards Night.

"We were delighted to have sponsored the Your Local Club Academy Games again this year — and what an exciting opportunity for the community of Wagga Wagga to host the event." said ClubsNSW Chairman, Dr George Peponis OAM.

"New South Wales clubs are some of the biggest supporters of grassroots sport right across the state, so the relationship between our organisation and RASi is a very natural one, and one we look forward to fostering well into the future."

"We are thrilled to have extended our longstanding partnership with RASi for another two years. This alliance will see ClubsNSW sponsor the Your Local Club Academy Games once again, as well as the RASi Awards Night, further strengthening the integral relationship between clubs and grassroots sport right across the state." added Peponis.



The South West Sydney Academy of Sport had 104 athletes and 31 coach and support staff attend the Regional Academy Games, where squads competed in Basketball, Golf, Hockey, Netball, Triathlon and Indoor Volleyball.

The 2024 Regional Academy Games will again take place in Wagga Wagga for its third and final year from April 12-14, 2024.

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# The Scoreboard: Academy Games Review

## BASKETBALL

The UAA Basketball program participated in both the boys and girls competition at the Regional Academy Games, with both squads demonstrating some outstanding sportsmanship both on and off the court.

One of the highlights of this year's 'Games was the Girls Team defeating ACT by a single point in an enthralling match up for the young squad. A result made more exciting given it was the first win for many of the girls in the team at this level of competition.

With the Boys Team taking note as they powered to a resounding win over the ACT to set up a quarter final against the highly fancied Hunter Academy of Sport.

Unfortunately both sides fell in their cross over finals, with the Girls also going down to the Central Coast Academy in a physical encounter to close out the weekend.

With the South West Sydney Academy of Sport Basketball program focused more on long-term development of athletes,

and not featuring the older and more experienced state-level performance athletes other Academy's had access too, the goal of this year's Basketball squad was to 'gain the experience and develop through the opportunity'.

Under the direction of Head Coach Jeff Cooper, and team coaches Milan Vrankjovic (Boys) and Ryan Strode and Brittany Anderson (Girls), both teams finished a credible 7th, marking the Academy's combined best overall performance in recent Academy Games.





## GOLF

Taking part alongside nearly eighty competitors from across the twelve Regional Academy programs, the South West Sydney Academy of Sport squad of six competing athletes began the weekend by contesting back-to-back individual rounds of 36 holes taking place over nearly four hours, at the picturesque Wagga Wagga Country Club.

Under the tutelage of Academy Golf Coordinator Scott Martyn, each individual athlete recorded some pleasing results, with Joey Eason and Zackie Kadir both finishing inside the top 25 males, whilst Libby Newcombe recorded a strong 14th overall and 6th on Nett in the female class, in her first Academy Games competition.

After a physically taxing first day on the course, Academy programs then merged themselves into teams for the Sunday, with the Jack Newton Junior Golf (JNKG) hosting a US-style teams' tournament, with the squad moving location to the small country town of Tumut, and the beautiful Tumut Golf Course.

Having the opportunity to play in a team environment was new to the Academy Games competition this year, yet was one warmly received by all Academies and athletes. Teams were ranked according to their athletes' individual rounds from Saturday.

Despite qualifying in eighth for Sunday's Teams' event, placing the Academy team into Division 2, in true South West fashion, the Academy team worked together to defeat the then-fifth ranked Hunter Academy of Sport across a nine hole teams match play tournament.

The Academy squad then took on the North Coast Academy of Sport in the Division 2 final, where South West Sydney Academy of sport prevailed, having climbed to finish fifth overall, and in the process, claiming the 'Regional Academy Games Division 2 Team Tournament' title.



# HOCKEY

The Club Menangle Hockey program's performance at the 2023 Academy Games was nothing short of exceptional, garnering widespread acclaim and leaving a lasting impression on fellow academy spectators.

Led by Head Coach Nathaniel Stewart, Assistant Coach Michelle Lewthwaite, Manager Lisa Clinch and Apprentice Coach Nathan Julius, they have together created an exceptional environment for the squad, emphasising trust, support, and collective growth. Their leadership and guidance have been instrumental in cultivating a positive atmosphere where the athletes feel motivated and empowered to excel

Over the weekend, the squads' success was not only measured in terms of wins and losses but also in the impact they had on the audience. Their electrifying style of play, coupled with their sportsmanship and respect for the game, earned them a legion of fans who appreciated not only their talent but also their character and values.



When faced with challenging and closely contested matches against Sydney Metropolitan Academy and Hunter Academy of Sport, these athletes displayed unwavering determination and a true South West never-give-up attitude.

Their mental fortitude and ability to stay focused under pressure allowed them to thrive in intense moments of the game, making critical plays that turned the tide at crucial points.

Whether it was scoring a clutch goal to take control or make a game-saving defensive stop, these athletes repeatedly rose to the occasion and delivered when they could. Their ability to maintain their composure, make smart decisions, and execute them with precision was a defining factor in their great performance over the weekend.

The final results saw the Boys finish a very commendable 4th, whilst the Girls, who featured an almost new look team most games and having to rely on fellow Academy's to field a full side, finished in a solid 6th position overall.



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## NETBALL AND NETBALL UMPIRES

The Bingara Gorge Netball squad is a shining example of team dedication, perseverance, and unwavering determination. Their hard work and relentless efforts are evident in every practice session, match, and tournament they undertake. Early mornings, and countless hours of training form the backbone of their success. Each player pushes their physical and mental limits to improve their skills, refine their strategies, and strengthen their teamwork. They sacrifice personal time and make immense commitments to honing their craft, constantly striving to be the best versions of themselves. The squad's work ethic and unity create an environment where every member thrives and grows together, fosters a true sense of camaraderie.

The Academy Games was a mixture of wins and losses, however, the losses were not seen as setbacks but as opportunities to learn, adapt, and improve. Head Coach Van Nguyen and the coaching team dissected each game, analysing the athletes performance with a critical eye and identifying areas for refinement.

The losses fuelled their hunger for success and propelled them to work even harder as they worked through the round robin-style games. With every win and every loss, the netball squad demonstrated their continued resilience, steadfast commitment, and confident belief in their abilities. They embraced both the highs and lows of their journey, knowing that every experience would contribute to their growth as an athlete and a team.

Their inspiring journey serves as a testament to the power of hard work, reinforcing the notion that with passion and perseverance, dreams can be achieved on the netball court and beyond.



The outstanding efforts on the weekend did not go unnoticed by the Netball NSW panel, awarding Siulolo Ritcher (SWSAS A) and Gabriella Arena (SWSAS B) the Most Valuable Player award for their respective team. In addition, both of our Umpires, Piper Steed and Teagan Lewis received their National B Umpires Badge during the weekend.

# TRIATHLON

The SIMEC Triathlon Squad demonstrated remarkable personal effort and dedication at the 2023 Academy Games. Through months of rigorous race simulation led by Head Coach, David Hine and Assistant Coaches, Cody Salter and Caitlin Sendt, and strength and conditioning with partners FitClinic, they honed their skills and prepared themselves for the intense competition. Their commitment to their sport was evident in their performances, as they pushed their limits and gave their all in every event. Each athlete showcased absolute determination and passion.

Finishing 10th overall and securing an impressive 6th place in the competitive A Final, Harry Lindbom demonstrated his ability to excel under pressure, his dedication to his training regimen and his focus allowed him to achieve such remarkable results.

Finishing 11th overall and securing an impressive 5th place in the A Final of the competitive 5th division, Bodhi Jackson showcased his immense talent and determination among the tough competition and is a testament to his perseverance and rapid improvement over the 2022/2023 season.

Securing a remarkable 2nd place overall and emerging as the champion of the 1st division in the D Final, Kade Burgess exhibited immense intensity. His outstanding results showcased his ability to push his boundaries and compete at a highly competitive level. His triumph as the division champion would be absent without his hard work, resilience, and exceptional skills over the 2023 season.

Finishing 5th overall and securing the 2nd position in the 2nd division of the D Final, Zoe Bruce showcased her exceptional talent and determination as a triathlete. Her strong performance throughout the competition highlighted her skill and endurance, as she faced off against tough competition in the bike leg. describing how she used the competitors behind her as motivation to push herself further. Zoe's ability to effectively manage her schedule and set SMART goals allowed her to achieve such a commendable result.

Their intense level of focus and resilience in the face of tough competition exemplified the true spirit of South West Sydney. The efforts of these talented individuals not only brought recognition to themselves but also represented the South West Sydney Academy of Sport with great pride and determination.



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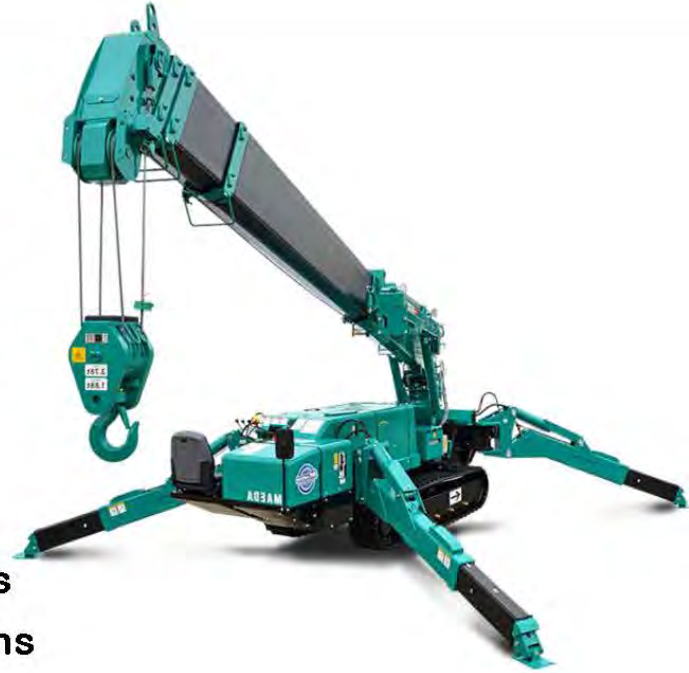
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# VOLLEYBALL

In what has been dubbed the "Spectator Games" due to hosts Southern Sports Academy's ability to host the event in a sport precinct that encouraged spectator participation and support. Highly demonstrated at the Indoor Volleyball tournament, which is fast becoming compared to its beach variety from the Olympics.

Chants of "South West Sydney" echoed throughout the venue all weekend, as the Academy's teams continued to show a high level of passion and skill throughout the tournament.

By Sunday afternoon, fellow Academies who were not playing in the final found themselves supporting South West Sydney, as the boys claimed back to back Academy Games titles by defeating the North Coast Academy. This was then followed moments later by the girls defeating our neighbouring Western Sydney Academy, and claiming redemption for their runners-up status the previous year.

Both matches were won in straight sets, and both teams going through undefeated capping off a remarkable tournament for the Academy Volleyball program. Not to be out done, the Academy also fielded two development teams, with the boys and girls development sides both finishing 5th out of the eight competing Academies.

The winning weekend continued South West Sydney's success at the Regional Academies' level, with the boys volleyball program now winning all three tournaments contested since the sport commenced in late 2021, and confirmed the Academy sides as favourites ahead of the VolleyballNSW Academy Challenge, to be held in Port Macquarie in July.





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# BMX RIDING TOWARDS STATE SUCCESS

The South West Sydney Academy of Sport Bounce Back Physiotherapy BMX Program, has been speeding ahead in the competitive world of BMX racing, showcasing unwavering dedication and exceptional talent throughout the first half of 2023.

The squad, which consists of 14 athletes, with six under the age of 15, recently embarked on an exhilarating camp in Tamworth, not only leaving their mark on the BMX track, but cementing their reputation as rising stars in the sport. The camp atmosphere proved to be a resounding success for the talented pool of athletes, who gained valuable experience training in a squad environment in preparation for the NSW/ACT State Series.

Under the guidance of their dedicated program coordinators, Cara Wilde and Daniel Morris, the weekend featured a comprehensive program that focused on various aspects of BMX riding, including bike handling, cornering techniques, gate starts and race strategies. In addition to the intense training sessions, the riders also had the chance to participate in friendly races, allowing them to put their newfound skills to the test.

"The weekend not only provided a platform for individual growth but also fostered a strong sense of camaraderie and teamwork amongst the riders. The athletes showcased their skills, determination, and team spirit during their time in Tamworth.



The camp provided a valuable opportunity for the riders to enhance their training, learn new techniques and bond with fellow teammates." said Academy Sport Services Coordinator Catarina Di Ramio.

The athletes were able to take these refined skills and put them into practice during Round 4 of the NSW/ACT State Series in early May, in Maitland. Having now had the experience of the country tracks, the athletes demonstrated their mastery of the sport and in the process displayed unparalleled speed and technique as they tackled the track.

"The squads exceptional performances left an indelible mark on the competition, with several athletes achieving remarkable results across different age and gender categories." added Di Ramio.

In the Male Cruiser 13–14-year-old category, Academy athletes Aston Holohan finished in 10th Place, whilst in the Male 14-Year-Old category, Cooper Young finished the best of the Academy athletes in 9th. With fellow athletes Corey Wickham, Aiden Christiansen, and Aston Holohan in 11th, 13th and 14th places respectively. In the Male Cruise 15-year-old category, Ryder Nicholson had an outstanding race to finish in 5th place and backed it up finishing 10th in the Men's Junior Superclass division. In the Male 16-year-old category, Isaac Robinson and Daniel McDonald placed 9th and 11th respectively, whilst Clay Jonson took out 9th in the Male 17-24-year-old division.

Not to be outshone were the Academie's two female riders, with Kiara Dewhurst finishing 7th in the Female 14-Year-Old category, whilst after finishing 9th in the Junior Women's division, Skylar Murphy then re-set her sights on finishing an impressive 15th in the Male (yes, *male*) 15-year-old category.

"The younger athletes in the program displayed immense potential and determination.

Their performances demonstrate the culminations of their hard work, dedication and relentless pursuit of excellence," said Di Ramio.

The athletes are now looking forward to several more training camps as they continue to aim high, ahead of the next rounds of the NSW State Series.

It has been a successful first half of the year for these athletes as the Academy marks another milestone in the BMX squad's journey, providing valuable experience and inspiration for the young riders within the program. The Team is poised for an exciting future, and their achievements are sure to serve as an inspiration for aspiring BMX riders throughout the South West Sydney area," said Di Ramio.

Looking ahead, the BMX program shows no signs of slowing down, with their sights set on future performance opportunities, the athletes remain committed to pushing their boundaries, setting new goals and constantly striving for improvement.





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Mia Rennie

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## Cultural Symbols and Yarning

The UAA Indigenous Athlete program had the privilege of participating in a Cultural Yarning's and Symbols workshop in early April.

The day, held at the Campbelltown Arts Centre, was filled with creativity, learning, and the sharing of stories, as our athletes had the opportunity to engage with local Indigenous culture.

The event brought together two distinguished Indigenous elders as special guests, including Uncle Richard Campbell, and Tallara Fittler from local Dharawal Aboriginal Cultural Experience leaders Gumarra, and local Elder, Aunty Joyce Mate of Campbelltown.

Their presence was invaluable as they generously shared their knowledge and expertise to educate and inspire our Indigenous athletes.

Uncle Richard and Aunty Joyce guided the athletes in traditional painting techniques and storytelling, as well as exploring the various meanings of symbols associated with the athletes personal totems. Allowing the athletes to connect with their cultural heritage on a deeper level.

Thanks to the hospitality of the Campbelltown Arts Centre, our athletes and guests were provided with a studio room where they spent the day immersed in the world of art.

Encouraged by Uncle Richard, the athletes felt comfortable sharing their personal stories and experiences with one another, in turn fostering a sense of unity and empowerment amongst the group. The atmosphere was filled with positivity and enthusiasm, making it an uplifting and memorable occasion for all involved.

One of the highlights of the day was the creation of the new South West Sydney Academy of Sport Indigenous polo shirt design.

Following the painting and storytelling sessions, the athletes dedicated their creative energy to mapping out and coming up with a shared design, whilst incorporating their individual narratives and cultural symbols into a work representing the Dharawal region, and Academy combined.

Over the course of several hours, they meticulously crafted the painting, infusing their personal meaning and leaving a sense of pride in their work.



By the end of the day, the athletes left behind two unique yet very distinct prints.

The efforts and dedication displayed by our Indigenous athletes are commendable. Each design tells a unique story, representing the rich diversity of our South West Sydney community, and recognising its rich Indigenous culture.

The Academy is immensely proud of the athletes artistic talents and their commitment to celebrating Indigenous culture through these significant pieces.

The Academy now eagerly anticipates sharing the South West Sydney Academy of Sport Indigenous shirt within the coming months.

This wearable artwork will serve as a symbol of cultural appreciation and unity, fostering awareness and understanding among individuals from various backgrounds.

Through this shared experience, we aim to promote inclusivity and respect for Indigenous traditions within the broader South West Sydney sporting community.



# NETBALLS SUPER SHOWDOWN

The Academy's Bingara Gorge Netball Program had a special opportunity in mid-April, where our athletes found themselves on court at the Ken Rosewall Area, to play an exhibition match prior to the GWS Giants v Collingwood Magpies Suncorp Super Netball League fixture.

The exhibition game against the Central Coast Academy of Sport provided the squad a final hit out prior to the Regional Academy Games, however the major highlight of the evening was definitely the clash between not only the Giants and Magpies, but two Academy Alumni athletes, with Amy Sligar (Giants) and Ash Brazil (Magpies) going head to head.

Both athletes a true representation of the talent that has developed out of the South West. We wish each of these girls and their teams the best of luck throughout the season.

Not to be out done on the court in recent weeks, fellow Academy Alumni Natalie Sligar was called up and participated with the Sunshine Coast Lightning, giving the Academy three active athletes in the Suncorp Super Netball league this year.

And continuing Netball's high-performance pathway success, current athletes Ellie Hart and Kelis Ogle, alongside alumni athlete Neveah Matenga have been selected in to the Netball Australia 17/U National Pathway Squad, where they will continue their journey towards wearing the Diamond Dress.



# LOCAL MP CONNECTS ACADEMY WITH COMMUNITY



Days after winning the NSW State Election, the Academy Office played host to our local Member for Campbelltown, Mr Greg Warren MP, who was not only keen for a tour of the heritage 'Coaching House', but to hear of the ongoing achievements of the region's developing young, talented athletes.

The Academy appreciated Mr Warren's visit, and the ongoing support of the NSW Government in providing support of not only the South West Sydney Academy of Sport, but the Regional Academies of Sport, and even more so in the lead up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic Games.



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# MARK OF A CHAMPION

Zoe Bruce

Getting up at crazy hours in the morning, even during Winter, or spending almost every spare moment after school training is something that very few would choose to do, but not if your goal is to become a champion in multiple sporting disciplines.

The Academy recently caught up with second-year SIMEC Triathlon program athlete Zoe Bruce, as she competed alongside her fellow squad mates at the Regional Academy Games in April, where she recorded an impressive 5th overall, and 2nd Female in her Divisional Final.

Zoe, How did you end up becoming involved in a sport where you, well, essentially compete in three different races, one after the other, on the same day?

I have always been an outgoing girl who has a strong love and passion for sport. When I was 8, and my mum learnt of a sport including three things I loved (swimming, cycling and running), she got me to have a go at a local club race. I knew from there on out, Triathlon and I would be sticking around together for a fair while.

How do you prepare for a triathlon race, which can by some accounts, can be pretty physically and mentally draining?

Before a race, I put my airpods in and listen to some music to get me hyped whilst I warm up. As I get into the water or before I start the race, I think to myself that the pain of the race is only temporary, but the results are there forever. I love to push my limits and love to compete around people who encourage me to push that little bit harder. It is honestly one of the best feelings.





You don't just compete in Triathlon do you Zoe, but also Cheerleading. What does a normal week look like for you?

Well, it consists of quite a bit of training, and to a non sporty person, I might seem a little crazy. Outside of triathlon I compete on three competition cheerleading teams.

Mondays are specifically for triathlon training, where I will train in two of the legs after school. Tuesdays are for cheer, where I train for over four hours. Wednesdays I train for both cheer and triathlon, followed by Thursday which is an easier day. I only train for cheer, oh and maybe add in a swim, Friday I only train for cheer, and on the weekends, my favourite time of the week, I generally compete, or train some more.

And school work? Truth is I don't even know, I have to make it work and stay on top of my classwork.

Wow, that is a very busy schedule, how far have you been able to go in Triathlon so far, and have there been any setbacks?

Last year I was able to qualify for the All Schools Nationals. However six weeks out I suffered a broken ankle that needed a two-hour operation. I was in a moon boot for five months, and only early this year was able to come back, and get draft legal so I could compete in the Regional Academy Games this year. It was so good to be back.

Now your back and had that Academy Games Experience, what advice would you give your fellow athletes, or athletes considering either Triathlon or Cheer?

The Academy has helped me through everything and has always supported me. The Academy has given me the tools and training to achieve my goals, and I know for my fellow athletes the Academy has helped too.

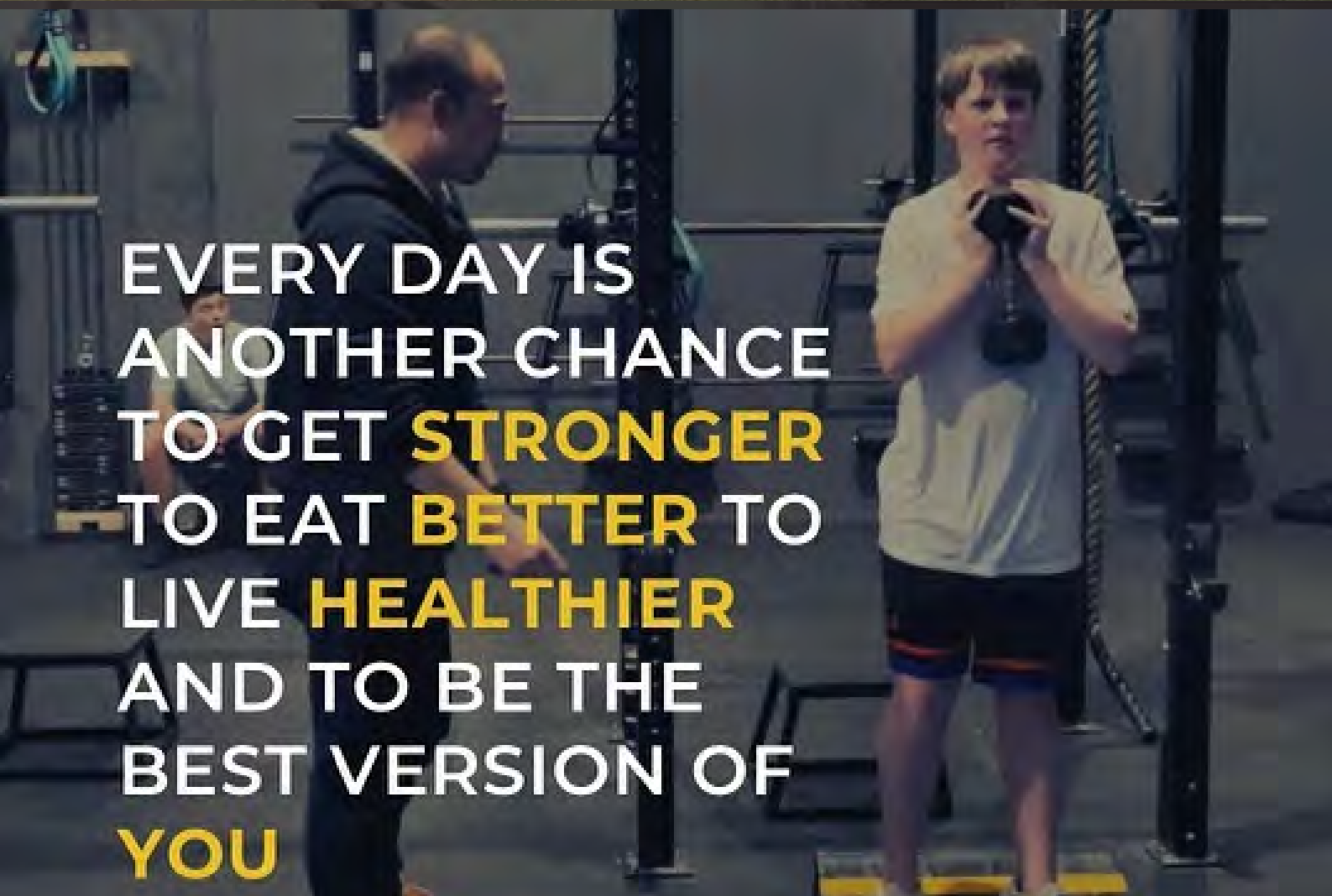
The Academy is supportive and gives athletes the opportunity to go far with their sport, but in the long run, you need to want it yourself. You need to have the drive and determination to make your dreams come true.





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## South West Spirit Celebrated at Civic Receptions

During the first half of this year, our athletes from the Wollondilly and Campbelltown local Government areas have had the opportunity to attend and be honoured at their local council Civic Reception.

### WOLLONDILLY

Prior to the Regional Academy Games in April, our Wollondilly based athletes (pictured above) headed to the Picton Bowling Club, where long-time Academy supporter Cr Blair Briggs represented the Mayor in recognising the incredible achievements of the region's 34 athletes, including sixteen basketballers.

Wollondilly also boasting an impressive 14 coach and support staff, making it one of the more popular regions for our coaches to call home.

Our increasingly popular Athlete Interview panel featured BMX racers Kayden and Skylar Murphy, and Triathlete Kade Burgess who provided an entertaining insight into their varied training and racing programs.

Second-year UAA Basketball athletes Mia Farrell and Emily Paulic (pictured below) presented a combined athlete response speech, thanking Wollondilly Shire Council for their ongoing support of the Academy.





## CAMPBELLTOWN

Our Campbelltown based athletes, parents and guardians were warmly welcomed to the Campbelltown Arts Centre for this year's Campbelltown Civic Reception, held in early May.

The Academy was fortunate to have the Mayor of Campbelltown, Dr George Greiss in attendance who himself recently graduated with a PhD in Philosophy from Western Sydney University. (Pictured below speaking with Academy CEO Gerry Knights)

Following on from formally recognising the 74 Athletes and 13 coaching staff who call Campbelltown home, Sport Program Manager Alley Hanagan led an enticing Athlete interview panel (featured above) that included Max Brown-Tjakuapi (Basketball), Zoe Bruce (Triathlon) and Priya Singh (Golf).

The evening was closed by Zoe Bruce who spoke on behalf of the Academy athletes, where she shared an emotional and heart-felt journey through early morning rises, and injury setbacks to achieve her sporting goals.





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# Golden Sunrise Muffins

## ► Ingredients

1/2 Cup Brown Sugar  
1/4 Cup Nuttlex Butter  
1/4 Cup Rice Bran Oil  
2 Eggs  
2 Ripe Bananas, Mashed  
1 Vanilla Bean  
1 2/3 All-Purpose Flour  
1 tsp Baking Soda / Powder  
1 tsp Cinnamon  
Sprinkle of Salt

### Topping

2 tbl Brown Sugar  
1 tsp Cinnamon  
1/2 tsp Nutmeg  
1/4 Cup Golden Syrup



## ► Directions

1. Preheat oven to 180 degrees C and line 12 muffin tin spaces
2. Beat the sugar, oil, butter and eggs until creamy, then add in the mashed bananas and vanilla bean
3. Fold in the flour, baking soda and cinnamon
4. Divide the batter equally into each muffin tin
5. Bake for 20mins or until bouncy
6. Microwave the remaining brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and golden syrup for 20secs and add to the top of the muffins.

Keep muffins in an airtight container for up to 3 days at air temperature, otherwise, they can be frozen for up to 3 months.

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Athletes from the Basketball Australia Centre of Excellence and NBA Global Academy go through an on-court skill session from Illawarra Hawks NBL Coach Jacob Jackomas at the recent National Coaches Conference

## Building Relationships as a Coach

*Recently our Sport Operations Manager, Stephen Craig, was fortunate enough to be invited to attend the Basketball Australia National Coaches Conference. The conference was held at the AIS, Canberra in early May, and featured over 180 basketball coaches from all levels of the sport, from grassroots, through to State and National teams, and the professional leagues.*

*The overarching theme of the conference was on "Athlete centred programs". A concept not unknown to our own Academy sport program aims.*

*Here is Stephen's recount in his words of what he considered the key take away from the conference and building relationships as a Coach.*

-----

When compared to coaches around the globe, Australian coaches are in fact some of the most resourced coaches in the world. And by far the most creative - we make great use of the resources we have.

Yet we often complain about being time poor and resource poor. We are not. We are however 'facilities' poor. Lack of court space is so often referred to as Basketball's biggest challenge. A claim echoed by not only many indoor sports, but junior sport in general.

And why this is so important, is that the long-term growth and development of an athlete comes from drilling scenarios in match play; and performing those learnings in games.

One of, if not my most important take away was that Australian coaches are actually far more skilled at teaching the fundamentals required in sport than what we give ourselves credit for.

Yet because we have access to so much technology and International influences, we can easily forget why we coach, or more so who we are coaching for.



This underlying theme of the 'athlete takes priority' was echoed amongst the high-level coaching staff who presented at the conference, including Illawarra Hawks head coach Jacob Jackomas, Cairns Taipans head coach and NBL coach of the year Adam Forde, and NBA Global Academy Assistant Coach Matt Blue.

At the end of the day, teaching of sports fundamental skills and key concepts has to be simply, taught.

However the way in which you teach it has to cater to, and focus on the individual athlete. It has to be authentic. Or as Goorjian suggests, "Or the players will call your b\*\*\*s\*\*\* and you lose."

Australian coaches need to start to realise how good we actually are as (or can be) as coaches. Whilst being careful however to not give ourselves too much credit.

Yet we cannot get caught up in not teaching or showing something because we don't want to look silly or make a mistake in front of an athlete or coaching peer.

After all, it's not about us. It's about those who we coach.

What knowledge we do know, is what we know; and how we as individuals teach it to the athletes... *now here's the clincher...* as long as the focus is on them, then we are in fact, doing our job and 'coaching'.

As Peter Lonergan, Director of High Performance Coach Development at Basketball Australia rightly points out that, "We will coach athletes who have forgotten more about the game, than what we have learned ourselves".

Circling back to our suggestion of 'time poor and facilities poor' comment is where the central heart of being intentional with our coaching lies. And begs to ask the simple question, Is there in fact really a genuine lack of training time?

A sentiment echoed by Australian Boomers Head Coach, Brian Goorjian, when he referenced his time walking in to the National camp in Las Vegas.

So many coaches comment that they only have two hours a week or less sessions with their athletes a week on court, and that they don't have access to the stadium, field or training facility any longer than that.

Ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, with a team featuring NBA calibre players such as Patrick Mills and Joe Ingles, even Goorjian found himself in a unique position, and in awe being around guys who had been coached by "better" coaches than himself.

But in reality, that's not the only time we should be giving to train our athletes.

"Who was I to walk in there and start telling them what to do", said Goorjian. (*Ahh, your the NATIONAL Head Coach!*).



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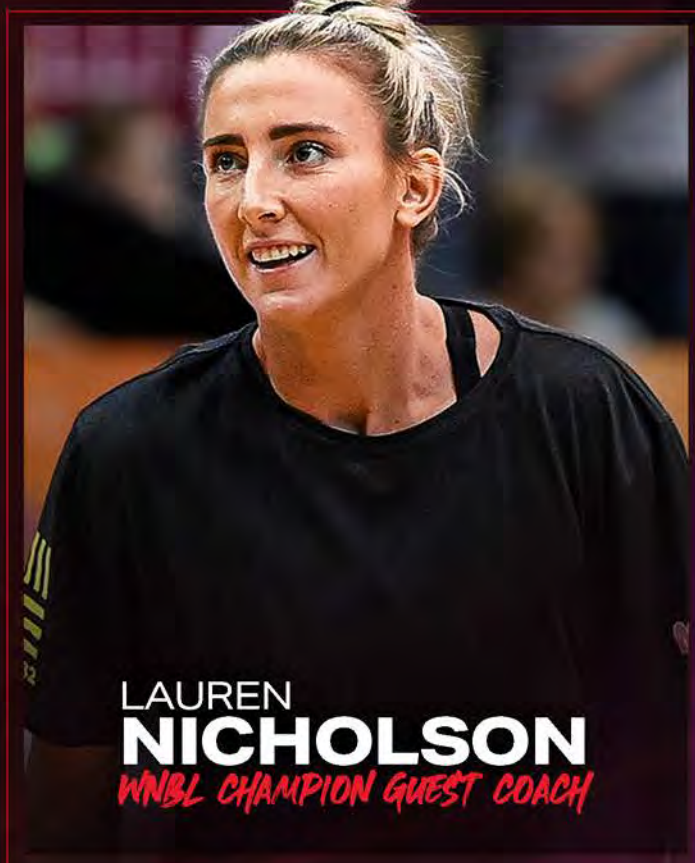
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**LAUREN NICHOLSON**  
*WNBL CHAMPION GUEST COACH*

If we are serious about being great coaches, and developing those one on one relationships with athletes and truly building successful teams, then we have to be intentional about making the time for our athletes.

Coach Goorjian time and time again spoke about making sure there were lots of 'one on ones'... meetings, not 1v1 skill drills. And the need to "get around your players, get to know them, what makes them tick."

President of the World Association of Basketball Coaches and Patrick Hunt AM, led the conference challenging coaches to meet the athletes expectations of an "Authentic and Consistent" message from their coach.

And in doing so challenged coaches to "make deliberate time to communicate with athletes."

A message echoed by former Australian Opals World Championship winning coach Jan Stirling later in the conference when she challenged coaches to find even just ten to fifteen minutes prior to training to talk to your players suggesting, "That's all it takes to show them you care".

Yes you may only get as small amount of time to train each week, but what time do you take pre or post training to be intentional about building authentic relationships with your athletes?

Echoed time and time again throughout the conference was that need to be intentional about finding the time.

NBA Global Academy Assistant Coach Matt Blue made it very clear that when a player asks you for extras, "you never say no".

"Always say Yes. Its your job to get them in the gym. Its about them. They choose to work with you. That extra half hour before or after training can make all the difference for them." said Blue.

Just ask Basketball Australia Centre of Excellence athletes Summer Hansen and Australian Boomer Alex Toohey. What they want from their coaches is simple.

"Communication. And it has to be a two-way street. Not just tell us, but learn with us. Understand what players are feeling as well. Understand our backgrounds and our history may be different. A good coach is someone you can go to and have that trust in." stressed Toohey.

Summer Hansen echoed Toohey's definition of a good coach, and added that "a coach who is selfless, puts the needs of the team above themselves, and builds those friendships and relationships where there is comfort and conversation."

"A good coach is one that has a high level of care and who is willing to put the work into the athlete."

Wise words from our Nation's future superstars and a timely reminder to us as coaches, we have to be intentional and find that extra time you need for training, to coach them.



*Our Operations Manager Stephen Craig managed to catch a selfie with National Boomers Coach Brian Goorjian*



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# The Last Play



It's hard to go past this image for The Last Play. In late May, three of our UAA Basketball athletes, Sophie Connor, Jade Dabrowski and Max Brown-Tjakuapi took part in Mt Annan Leisure Centre and YMCA NSW Wheelchair Basketball Charity Gala Day.

The athletes finishing Runners-Up in their first experience trying Wheelchair Basketball.

"I was surprised at how difficult it was to dribble, and push the chair but by the second game we caught up to the pace and had a lot of fun", said Max Brown-Tjakuapi.

Well done athletes for taking up this opportunity to challenge themselves outside their comfort zone, whilst still within a sport they somewhat knew.

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## Dates for the Diary:

**Liverpool Civic Reception**  
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Thursday 8 June 2023.

**Leadership Challenge Day**  
Burns Obstacle Course  
Saturday 17 June 2023

**Volleyball RASi Championships**  
July 7-9, 2023  
Port Macquarie

**26th Annual Athlete Graduation  
and Sport Awards Dinner**  
The Cube Convention Centre  
Friday 28 July 2023

**Netball RASi Challenge**  
September 22-24, 2023  
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**Academy Golf Day**  
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