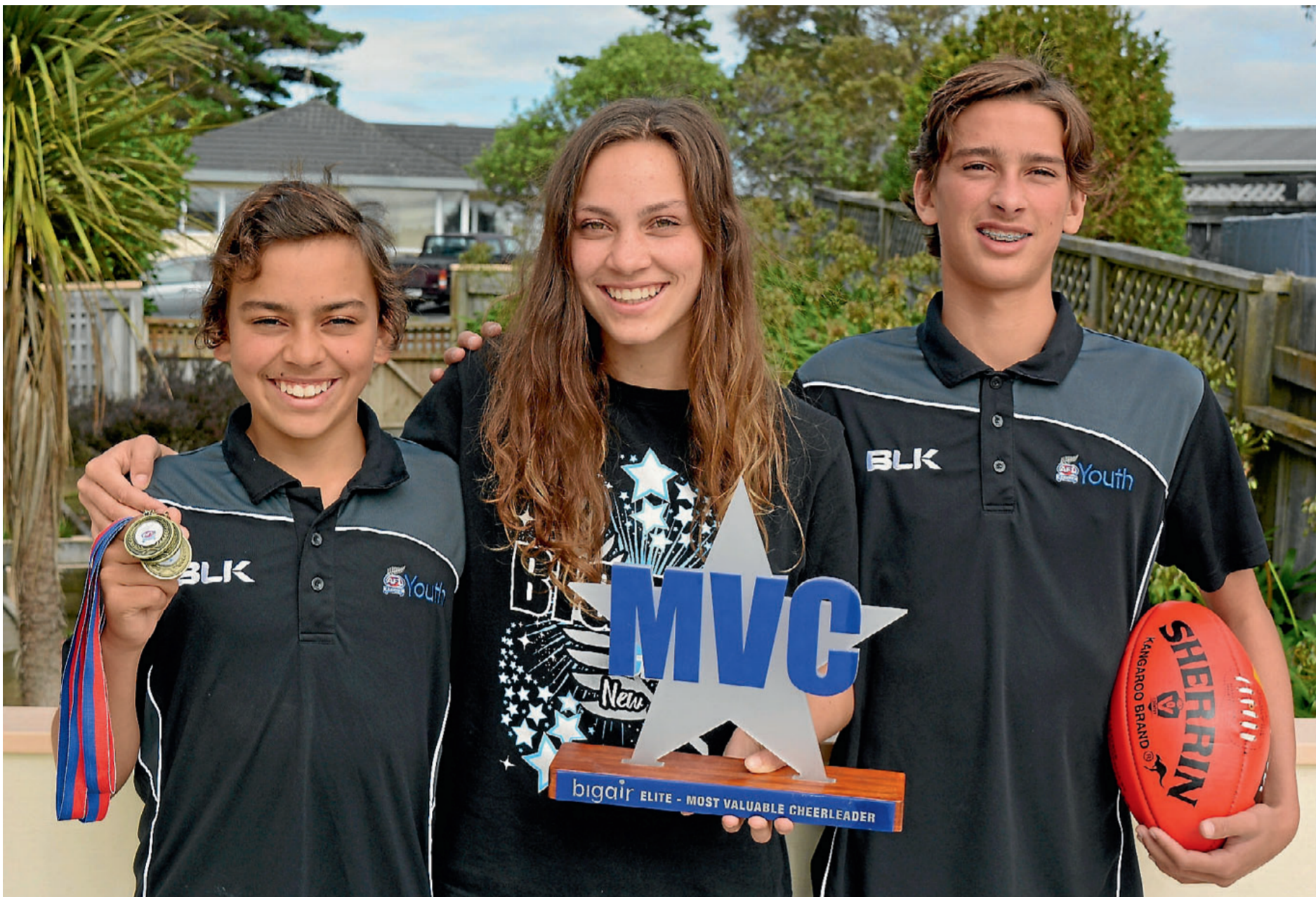


College Sport in association with the Massey University Journalism School

A family focus on sport



Wellington siblings Aidan, 13, left, Madeleine, 17, and Jonah Christians, 15, compete in different sports, but all share a similar focus and dedication.

PHOTO: ANDRE CHUMKO

ANDRE CHUMKO

Grenada Village siblings Aidan, Madeleine and Jonah Christians may compete on different playing fields, but they all share a similar focus and dedication.

The Christians play a total of four sports, with Aidan, 13, and Jonah, 15, competing in AFL, rugby and surfing, and Madeleine, 17, proving to be a rising star in the field of competitive cheerleading.

They follow in the footsteps of their father Renaldo Christians, who was a top youth coach for football in America, Europe and South Africa, and worked with teams at renowned European clubs PSV Eindhoven and IBV.

Last December, Aidan and Jonah were both selected for the 2017 AFL New Zealand Academy, with Aidan competing in the level 1 team, and Jonah level 2.

Jonah was also selected for the 2017 National Combine on April 21 at Wellington's ASB Sports Centre – one of 35

athletes to test in front of AFL talent scouts.

Current New Zealand Sevens player Sam Dickson was previously scouted during the 2012 National Combine.

The pair competed in matches over Anzac weekend against New South Wales Independent Schools and the Mornington Peninsula BlueScope Steelers at Hutt Park and Westpac Stadium in Wellington.

Ahead of the games, Aidan said he was "really excited" to be playing AFL on a national level for the first time.

The Scots College boys' training programme in the leadup to the four-day event was intense, and included fitness, footwork, speed and endurance work.

They trained almost every day and even honed their skills while they were away on vacation.

During a holiday to Napier over summer, the boys said they would practise sprints "up and down the beach" because there was no track.

Jonah's passion for AFL began while he was on an exchange to Berwick Gram-

mar School in Australia in 2015.

His host family took him to an AFL match where he had the opportunity to meet professional teams and he was encouraged to participate in the sport at his exchange school.

He brought his passion for the sport back to New Zealand and has been competing, along with Aidan, ever since.

On the other hand, Madeleine, who is in her final year at Onslow College, has been competitive cheerleading for six years and is preparing for a series of six upcoming tournaments.

These include the Australian All Star Battle Championships on the Gold Coast in August and the New Zealand Cheer Union Nationals in Wellington in October.

Madeleine is a member of the Bigair Cheersports team based in Tawa, which in February flew to Texas for the National Cheerleaders Association All Star Nationals, an annual competition that hosts about 150 teams from across the globe.

Madeleine's team placed fourth over-

all out of 10 teams competing in their level, and first overall of all the international teams.

"We hadn't done anything international so that was a huge honour."

After two years of pushing, Madeleine also managed in 2015 to convince her school to start a cheerleading team which she now captains.

Last year, she was awarded the most valuable cheerleader award at Bigair Cheersports, and she received a senior achievement award at Onslow College for cheerleading.

She trains six days a week and is hoping her talent for the sport will help her get a scholarship to an American university.

Renaldo said he and his wife Emily could not be more proud of their children.

"It makes you really, really proud to watch them succeed as individuals in all their individual sports."

"They've got to keep doing the hard work and keep their feet on the ground. It's a big honour for our family."

College teams build on solid foundations

JONATHAN GUILDFORD

The immense strength of women's high school softball in Wellington has been showcased at the most recent division one and two national secondary schools tournaments.

Wellington East Girls' College (division one) and Sacred Heart College (division two) won both of the tournaments last month.

Wellington East travelled to North Harbour's Rosedale Park where they took out the tournament comfortably, winning all games except one against One Tree Hill College from Auckland.

This most recent victory adds to the legacy Wellington East has created over the division one tournament in recent years. They have won the title eight times since the inaugural tournament in 1982 and their 2017 win is their fourth consecutive victory.

Sacred Heart College qualified for the division one tournament but management decided to attend the division two tournament instead. This tournament was held in Lower Hutt and flight prices had skyrocketed due to the Adele concert that was being held at the same time.

Sacred Heart College went through the entire tournament unbeaten, winning every game by mercy.

"There was no team close to competing," said coach Scott Robertson.

The team had been together for three years and this was the first time they had competed at the division two tournament.

"Division two was not as challenging," said pitcher Bailey Robertson.

Both teams believe their past and current success came down to the strength of softball at club level.

Wellington East fielded an entire squad that played representative softball for Wellington and also played for a club throughout the various grades. Star Marama Makea was also selected in the New Zealand Junior White Sox side.

The Sacred Heart College squad is very much the same with all except two of the members playing representative softball for Hutt Valley and local clubs.

Stars Bailey Robertson and Pallas Potter were also selected for the Junior White Sox, with Potter captaining the side.

Scott Robertson believed the impact of club and representative softball was a large reason why women's secondary school softball in the area was displaying such dominance.

"Past greats like Naomi Shaw have been giving back to the game and it means I do not have to do much coaching; I can more guide the students," he said.

Wellington East coach Steve Silo reiterated this point as he believed his role was to carry on what previous coaches had already done.

"Without the foundations from previous coaches it would not have been as easy," he said.



Wellington East Girls' softball coach Steve Silo holds the division one trophy alongside co-captain Harmony Raphana-Sila, far left, and co-captain Marama Makea.



Sacred Heart College coach, Scott Robertson with team members from left, Pallas Potter, Destiny Savage and Bailey Robertson.

Sacred Heart's Potter, along with leadership players Bailey Robertson and Destiny Savage, believed the quality of softball was a lot higher at club level, and it meant they were better equipped when competing at high school level.

Catcher of the side, Savage, thought the strong support by family and friends in the Wellington softball community was a huge contributing factor in why the teams did so well.

Makea agreed that support from family and friends were a fundamental reason for softball being so dominant at secondary school level.

"The softball community is quite close and having the same coaches throughout the years and a lot of support through family and friends has helped me personally," Makea said.

Both Sacred Heart and Wellington East had a strong leadership role among the older players which aided in providing a more rounded performance.

Both teams were fortunate enough to be keeping a core group of players heading into next year's division one tournament, which would be held at Lower Hutt's Fraser Park.

Sacred Heart were excited to play on home soil and they would have their eyes set on taking out the tournament.

Meanwhile, Wellington East were cherishing the moment to continue their success at division one by gaining their fifth consecutive victory.

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