

College Sport

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Wellington College end 22-year drought

LIAM HYSLOP

Twenty-two years is a long time to wait for a title, especially for a school like Wellington College.

But that was how long it took for their senior basketball team to capture another Pohlen Cup, ending their drought with a tense 65-63 win over rivals St Pat's Town on Friday night at the ASB Indoor Sports Centre.

Wellington led throughout most of the game, including by 11 (38-27) at halftime, but defending champions Town clawed their way back to 47-47 at the end of the third quarter.

It went all the way down to the final play with 4.7 seconds to go and Wellington leading by two. Town inbounded the ball, but Wellington's defence came up big to secure their first title since 1995.

Wellington had lost five times to Town during the season, but coach Salo Taufale said they were confident heading into the final.

"Even though the results hadn't gone our way and St Pat's were better than us at those points of the season, I felt that our preparation had got us to be at the stage where we were not the same team we were earlier in the season."

Wellington lost their original head coach, Danny Page, to a job helping run an NBA academy in Mumbai, India, about five weeks ago.

That saw Taufale step up from assistant to head coach, a transition which he said needed to go as



Stone (Johnny) Helu, right, in action for Wellington College as they beat St Patrick's College, Kilbirnie, in the Pohlen Cup final. PHOTO: MASANORI UDAGAWA



Sarah Penese takes a shot for St Mary's in their Sharp Cup final win over HVHS.

smoothly as possible. "The biggest thing to do was to manage through that period where

they lost a coach that they all believed in. The No 1 goal for me was to connect and build that trust

with the kids. I guess that flowed through and culminated in Friday's result.

"I always asked them what their goals were and what they believed in and they believed they

At a glance

Pohlen Cup final: Wellington College 65 (Johnny Helu 20, Lelei Tautau 17, Billy Tompkinson 13) St Pat's Town 63 (Matthew Brien 26, Rashaan Metuariki 14, Francis Mulvihill 12). Q1: 18-14, HT: 38-27, Q3: 47-47.

Sharp Cup final: St Mary's College 69 (Sarah Penese 17, Grace Hunter 14, Leni-Lia Moananu 12, Te Araroa Sopoaga 10) Hutt Valley High School 49 (Leah Mafua 20, Grace Vaofusi 15).

where we were the last two Fridays."

Playing in a lot of close games this season had given his team vital experience heading into the tournament week, Taufale said.

"The good thing for us about winning on Friday was the experience the kids will get. Some of the kids were like deer in the headlights, but I didn't take them off because of that. I let them play through their mistakes because that learning experience will hopefully help them this week.

"It was the same when we played teams down the bottom of the table and were just beating them by three or four. What my boys didn't understand then was it's the experience of being in close games that we learned from those games."

could win the championship. I said 'well, that's all I need. I need you to believe that and commit to it'."

Taufale said he hoped Page would put the championship on his CV as he had earned it through his three-year contribution to their basketball programme.

Wellington now head to the AA Zone 3 (lower North Island) tournament, starting on Wednesday in Palmerston North, with the aim of qualifying for the national tournament. To do that they must finish in the top six. They have been drawn in pool D alongside Hastings Boys' High School, Feilding High School, Freyberg High School, Scots College and St Bernard's College.

"What we want to do as a goal for the team to is get through our pool and qualify first. That means each day we have to win the two games we play.

"We'll go from there into the knockout stage and we're back to

It was a much more comfortable affair for St Mary's College in the Sharp Cup final as they captured their second straight title with a 69-49 win over Hutt Valley High School, again going undefeated in the Wellington competition.

St Mary's were the dominant team all year, with only one game where they didn't win by double digits. That was against HVHS on August 18 when they prevailed 70-68.

The final was much easier as they were always in control.

They head to their AA Zone 3 and have drawn Napier Girls' High School, Hastings Girls' High School, Sacred Heart Girls' College (New Plymouth) and Havelock North High School.

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