

COLLEGE SPORT



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Double hoopla for Rongotai youngsters

BASKETBALL

RONGOTAI COLLEGE is on the verge of a return to basketball relevance.

That's if their junior team is anything to go by, having won the Wellington (Thompson Cup) and lower North Island junior titles this season, losing just one game out of 19 along the way.

Shooting guard Ezraha Vaigafa said the lower North Island win came as a surprise. They won all six of their games, including against a tough Napier Boys' High School (69-67) in pool play and Palmerston North Boys' High School (69-63) in the final.

"It felt really good, we weren't expecting it. We reached the final and it was great to just be there."

"We made a lot of mistakes and a lot of turnovers due to nerves [in the final], but once that was out of our system the boys put everything into it."



Rongotai College celebrate winning the Thompson Cup, beating Tawa in the final 63-51.

Centre Jaylin To'o said the tournament result could have been different had they not beaten Napier Boys' in their second pool match.

"It was a back and forward

kind of game and it came down to the last couple of seconds and I got fouled and got put to the free-throw line and made both of them."

To'o said their coaching team of

Rob Clarke, former Tall Black Chris Tupu and Wellington Saints assistant coach Zico Coronel – a lineup which would not be out of place on a National Basketball League bench – had helped them

immensely. "We were blessed to have those guys coaching us."

Tupu, a Rongotai College old boy and teacher at the school, said they had tried to instil a ruthless winning mentality into the team which they hoped would continue as they moved into the senior team in the coming years.

"That winning culture and mentality is important with this group moving forward."

"Across any sport, that ruthless attitude about being the best you can be at all times is important. We stressed that and it came through in the way they played."

The 1990s were heady days for Rongotai College – they won five Pohlen Cups (Wellington senior title) in seven years but haven't tasted success since their 1998 triumph.

As you would expect, their juniors were also strong in those days. They won two Thompson Cups, the last coming 20 years be-

fore this year's win.

The past 15 years have not been so kind to any Rongotai team.

The senior team has been in and out of the premier division since 2006, dropping as low as the third-tier division two, while the juniors' best finish was a second to Wellington College in the 2010 Thompson Cup.

Tupu said installing an attractive junior basketball programme at the school was the key to long-term success in an environment where you can't recruit players from other high schools.

"We want to attract those ball players in the area to come to Rongotai – there's a bit of competition to get kids these days."

"We're not offering scholarships or money but we're saying to the kids that are considering Rongotai that we are in the mix as a strong basketball programme in the years to come."

Another part of increasing the

talent at the school was having kids train with the New Zealand Basketball Academy.

Both To'o and Vaigafa are part of it and were playing for the academy in Las Vegas when Rongotai suffered their only loss of the season, 67-62 against Wellington College in round eight of the Wellington competition.

Those two also combined to score 47 of their team's 63 points when they beat Tawa College by 12 points in the Wellington final, although Vaigafa dismissed suggestions that they were a two-man team.

"Every individual player stepped up for every game. It wasn't just one player playing well, it was about the team."

It's that sort of teamwork, coupled with that ruthless winning mentality, which should see Rongotai return to being competitive in Wellington senior basketball in the next three years.

Silver lining for Curtin at Youth Games

BOWLS

SEAMUS CURTIN has achieved his goal of winning a medal at the Youth Commonwealth Games.

The 15-year-old Aotea College student put in an outstanding performance to overcome all but one of his opposition in winning silver in the singles at the Games in Samoa earlier this month.

He followed up that result with fourth in the mixed pairs alongside Ashleigh Jeffcoat (Hamilton Girls).

The singles didn't start as he planned, suffering a loss in his first pool game to Englishman Bradley Coles.

But he wasn't too put off by the loss, saying he was still adjusting to the greens in Apia.

"I lost my first game to England, but I was really happy, it was nice to get hold of how the green was going."

"Our greens over here range from 16 seconds upwards, that's how fast the bowl gets down to the other end, and over there it was running about 13 seconds."

"It was much different, so it means a completely different game."

He had tried to prepare for the different conditions by practising on Plimmerton Bowling Club's croquet green, but nothing can replace rolling on the actual green.

Once he had adjusted to the conditions, he won his next four games to make the semifinal, against Northern Irishman Stephen Kirkwood.

The match proved to be a tense affair, he said.

"It was neck and neck the whole way in the semifinal and he got a bit ahead, he got to two points left."

"He was playing short ends, so I won an end and put the jack long and got a three to win [21-19]."

The final did not go to plan – a 21-14 loss to Australian Jonathan Davis – but Curtin said he was pleased with how he played.

"He played really well, I wasn't too disappointed in how I played. I lost, but he played a really good game."

The mixed pairs came after the singles, so Curtin and Jeffcoat were already adjusted to the conditions and won all their pool matches.

Unfortunately, things didn't go as they would have liked in the knockout stages, Curtin said.

"We went into the semifinal and we just didn't have our momentum into that game and just couldn't find the rink."

"We played Cook Islands and they played a really good game as



Aotea College year 10 student Seamus Curtin competes during the lawn bowls mixed pairs at the Youth Commonwealth Games in Samoa earlier this month. Photo: GETTY IMAGES

well. We played better in the bronze medal match, but again they just played better than us, but we were happy with fourth."

Curtin played from 7.45am to 5pm for three days straight and said the 30 degrees Celsius heat took its toll from early on.

"It wasn't draining so much physically but mentally. Our coach was really strict on keeping the fluids up to keep focused, so I was drinking about four bottles of water per game."

Curtin will now travel to an under-26 championship in Christchurch this week, before his focus turns to nationals at the end of the year.

When asked for one thing he would take away from his Games experience, he said it was the camaraderie in the New Zealand team across all the sports as everyone would show up to support their team-mates.

"It was a really memorable moment, you just look around and see so many athletes and you think they're all so good at what they do and it's just really cool to be amongst them."

"Even if someone lost they'd still come support, it was really cool to have so many people watch bowls."

"You wouldn't think under-18 players would want to watch it when they could go watch athletics or weightlifting or archery, but it was cool to have their support."



Wairarapa defeated St Matthew's Lucien Burt, left, tackles Wellington College midfielder Paul Horrocks as he is surrounded by Wairarapa defenders.

Photo: MARGO BREMFORD

Same again as Wairarapa reign supreme

HOCKEY

WAIRARAPA COLLEGE have done the double in the Wellington secondary schools premier hockey tournament for the second year in a row.

The boys team beat Wellington College 3-1 last Friday, while the girls defeated St Matthew's 4-0 in their final last Wednesday.

It replicated last year's results between the same opposition, although those games were much closer with the boys winning in a shootout and the girls triumphing 1-0.

This year would be much more comfortable, as Wairarapa College's Lucien Burt sealed Wellington's fate with a hat-trick. His first came after nine minutes before he hit Wellington again from a penalty corner just before halftime.

'The boys dug deep, I couldn't be more happy.'

Wairarapa captain Gus Waking



Wellington looked to fight back in the 30th minute, with Hunter Stent breaking through Wairarapa's tough defence to score his side's only goal.

However, Wellington were unable to equalise, having lost most of their possession as Wairarapa

pushed back. Wellington's Hiren Mani made numerous intercepts but was unable to get the ball through to Wairarapa's circle.

Wellington made the decision in the last minutes to substitute their goalie Sam Dearsly for an extra player.

The risk did not pay off, with Wairarapa bouncing on the gap in the defence. Burt was able to complete his hat-trick as he snuck through the Wellington defenders with 13 seconds to go, successfully securing a strong win for Wairarapa.

It made way for the final whistle, where an elated Wairarapa College celebrated and a downcast Wellington College

AT A GLANCE

Wairarapa College 3 (Lucien Burt 3)
Wellington College 1 (Hunter Stent). HT: 2-1.

walked slowly off the field.

Wairarapa side coach Grant Brewster said, through a grinning smile, that he was incredibly proud of his team.

"It's been an even contest over this year."

"This game came down to error, or luck."

He was referring to the fact that Wellington had beaten Wairarapa twice this year, but were unable to

come up with the goods in the final.

Wairarapa captain Gus Waking said he was ecstatic with their win.

"The boys dug deep, I couldn't be more happy."

"I thought Wellington College had the second half, not on the scoreboard but in general."

Wellington College coach Manoj Parbhu was disappointed at the end result, but said Wairarapa just played a better game.

"Wairarapa deserved to win on their performance and their execution of skills was superior to ours."

"Ultimately that's what won them the game."

COLLEGE SPORT BRIEFS

RUGBY

Injury concerns for NZSS

The New Zealand Secondary Schools rugby team came through a solid hitout against the New Zealand Schools Barbarians but have injury problems to worry about. They won the match 20-18, but lost both of their hookers to injury.

Brodie McAlister, from Shirley Boys' High School, suffered a high ankle sprain, while his replacement Ben Power, from Hutt International Boys' School, suffered a shoulder injury. It added to injuries to Tom Florence, the New Plymouth Boys'

High School loose forward who was ruled out of the team during the week, while the Scots College Umaga-Jensen twins, Peter and Thomas, were both rested due to minor injuries. The team are due to play Samoa Schools in Brisbane tomorrow.

JUDO

Rivett-ing effort

Alex Rivett from Onslow College took home a slew of medals from the North Island Judo Championships earlier this month. He won gold in both his weight and open division in the under-18 section, while also winning silvers in his weight in

both the under-21 and senior men's section. Other winners included St Bernard's College's Daniel Lloyd, who won gold in his weight in the under-18 division, while Sacred Heart's Lucy Duncun won silver in both her weight and open class of the under-18 division. Lloyd went on to win gold in the same divisions at the South Island Championships where he was joined by his twin sister, Paris, who won under-18 silver in both her weight and the open division. Rivett then flew to Sydney with Wellington High School's Qona Christie to compete in the New South Wales International Open. Both won under-18 gold in their weight classes.

FLOORBALL

Taking the floor

The New Zealand Secondary Schools Floorball Championships will be held at ASB Sports Centre in Kilbirnie this weekend. Teams from Auckland and Christchurch will take on Wellington's best in three different grades: senior Boys, senior Girls and under-15 Boys. Rongotai College are the defending boys champions after beating Scots College in an exciting final last year. For the senior girls, Queen Margaret College are the defending champions and will have a few new young players in their team this year. Floorball is a mix between hockey

and ice-hockey, played on an indoor hardcourt.

POOL

Batt on cue

Upper Hutt College's Thomas Batt won the Wellington regional final of the Pool 4 Schools tournament. Batt was one of the students in this year's junior cue sports development seminar at the New Zealand junior 8-ball nationals in Upper Hutt and beat Riki Baker from Otaki's Te Kura Kaupapa Maori o Te Ritto. Third was Te Atapo Kipiona-Devonshire, also from Otaki, while Naenaena College's Caleb Poihipi finished fourth.

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