

School Sport Australia Men's and Women's Basketball Team Tour of the USA 2007/2008

Game 7 versus Mt Zion Christian Academy, Durham, North Carolina

Women's Game

School Sport Australia 66 def. Mt Zion Christian Academy 34

The girls came out playing hard and like in previous games surprised the opposition. The Mt. Zion warriors were not expecting the tough defence that the Aussies have been renowned for on this tour, which created easy transition baskets at the other end. Great transition from Courtney Browne, Burke and Wallis saw the Aussies open up a 21 to 5 lead at quarter time.

The warriors were much more patient in the second period getting the ball through hands and slowing the game down. To add to this the Aussies found it hard to finish off close to the ring and the quarter turned into a defensive slog. Aussies up 29 to 14 at the half!

Coach Spicer changed the defence after half time from a press falling back to a zone, to a fall court man to man. This provided the stagnant Aussies with some run and forced the warriors out of their game. To add to this the ball movement created great shots inside with Lobb and Short scoring freely. Three quarter time 44 to 23!

The defensive assignment done by Amy Browne and Danni Natoli on the warriors star No. 20 in the second half led to the Aussies controlling the game and running away for a very good win. Good on court leadership from Cameron and Priestly helped the Aussies score freely and end up with a 32 point victory.

Coach Spicer had nothing but praised for this unit and said that it had been a pleasure coaching this team that went 6 and 0 for this tour.

SCORERS:

Lobb – 13, C.Browne – 11, Wallis – 10, Priestly – 8, Short – 8, Burke – 6, Natoli - 4, Vella – 2, Hirons – 2, Cameron – 2, A.Browne.

Men's Game

School Sport Australia 76 lost to Mt Zion Christian Academy 77

Here we go again. The stands had college coaches, including Duke assistants and a parochial local crowd cheering on their nationally ranked team. Right from the start this game was one worth paying to see. The ball went from one end to the other at a very fast pace. The Aussies were sharing the ball early and every body was scoring. The defence from both teams was very good and limited the scoring early. Quarter time 17 to 19.

The sting had been taken out of the game and both teams settled into running their stuff. McCallum, Allen and Caspersz were all adding to the scoreboard and the Aussies were doing well. The warriors were a big team and kept the pacer with the Aussies by going inside and pounding the boards. All tired up at the half. 37 all!

The intensity after half time went up a notch. Jenkins finally found his range and nailed three huge threes in the third period. Still the Warriors hung in their. Their star No. 13, Johnson whose is a junior and looking at a big division 1 college was carrying them. Two or three steals from the warriors leading to easy baskets kept the game close. Aussies up 56 to 54 at three quarter time!

Blanchfield fired up nailing three huge threes and giving the Aussies a big chance to win this great game. Ellis was doing it at both ends and Natoli's leadership was providing the team with great offensive opportunities. 59-58 with 6 minutes to play and both coaches were throwing everything at each other. Both teams were in the bonus soon after and it was 68 all with 3.30 to play. Johnson for the warriors and foul shots for the Aussies led to 72-74 with 1.20 to play. TO's, tough "D" and strong work under the basket down the stretch saw the Aussies lose another game, this time by 1.

Coach Sue See was full of praise for the team's effort throughout the seven games. The fact that the 4 to 3 win loss record could have been 7 and 0 with a bit of luck left the players feeling this tour has been one to remember.

SCORERS:

Blanchfield - 12, Jenkins - 11, Ellis - 10, Caspersz - 10, McCallum - 10, Allen - 6, Phillips - 6, Huntington - 4, Kenny - 4, Coe - 2, Natoli, Smith.

Game 6 versus Greenfield School, Wilson, North Carolina

Men's Game

School Sport Australia 62 def. Greenfield School 59

This game started with the Aussies in control against a team from a small rural area. The 1A team, which is a small school, was organised and very well coached. The pressure defence, good running and some outside shooting enabled the Aussies to get a 16 point lead at quarter time. The quarter saw many highlights as Ellis, Caspersz and Todd (Jerry) Blanchfield all threw down some monster jams. At the conclusion of the first period the score favoured the Aussies 23 - 7.

The second quarter saw the Greenfield Knights step up their game and in turn shorten the Aussies lead. The Aussie's attempted to slow down the offence and run through their sets, however the Knights took advantage of the slower tempo cutting the deficit significantly. The Aussies held on to end the half up 37 - 26.

The third period had the Aussie's on the back foot as the Knights turned up the intensity early. Their hustle and pressure defence combined with some questionable hometown calls contributed to the lead dwindling towards the end of the quarter. The momentum swung towards the home side as the crowd ignited a 8-0 run. The free throw discrepancy allowed the Knights back in the game, the score 51 - 44.

The final quarter saw the home side draw equal with the Australians midway through the period. The questionable calls continued as the intensity of the game increased from the first three quarters. Instead of becoming flustered the Aussie's stepped up their defence hindering the Knight's offence and limiting the scoring prowess of their star player. Caspersz clutch free throws combined with Natoli's exceptional defence contributed to the Aussie's getting over the line in a close one, 62 - 59 with the Knight's missing a tough jump shot on the buzzer.

SCORERS:

Phillips - 13, Blanchfield - 13, Ellis - 11, Caspersz - 8, Huntington - 6, Allen - 7, McCallum - 2, Kenny - 2, Jenkins - 4, Coe - 2, Natoli, Smith.

Game 5 versus Kennedy Charter School, Charlotte, North Carolina

Women's Game

School Sport Australia 102 def. Kennedy Charter School 12

The Aussie girls extended their tour record to 5 and 0 with a very convincing win against an enthusiastic but under manned team from Kennedy Charter School. The game was played in good spirits and every Aussie player contributed to the one sided score line.

The skill level of the Aussies and their foot speed saw them open with a 23 to 0 first quarter. They continually force errors from Kennedy and the turnovers led to easy baskets at the other end. With all the Aussie players sticking to the game plan this scoreline was very rewarding.

The second period was a continuation of the team pressure in defence which lead to easy baskets again. Kennedy showed plenty of spirit and consequently were able to get some scores on the board. Unfortunately, they could not stop the scoring at the other end and the Aussie machine rolled on. Halftime 49-6.

The game continued in the same frame after the half with the Aussies working very hard in their half court defence. This continued to be productive forcing Kennedy into turnovers again and leading to all the Aussie players being able to contribute to the score board total. Three quarter time 72-11

The final quarter saw the Aussies get the score to 100 plus with a hard working defensive structure. Six players ended up with double figures and coach Spicer was able to get all his players plenty of court time in preparation for the big game against mount Zion in two nights.

SCORERS:

Natoli - 12, Priestly - 10, C.Browne - 10, A.Browne - 10, Short - 10, Burke - 10, Wallis - 9, Vella - 8, Hirons - 6, Cameron - 6, Lobb - 5.

Men's Game

School Sport Australia 79 def. Kennedy Charter School 50

The boys are back on track! The game commenced in a vigorous fashion as the small yet rowdy crowd created quite the atmosphere. Both teams opened in a fast running game with little offensive sets. The Charter boys lacked in height, but made up for it in athleticism. The quarter finished with the Aussie boys up by 3.

The second quarter was much the same in the sense of low scoring by both teams. The Aussie boys gained the points through fast offensive transition with Sam Allen gathering plenty of assists as Drew Phillips finished in his unorthodox but effective fashion. Yet as the boys kept attempting to pull away, the young Charter's kept holding on. The quarter finishing at 26-30.

The third was a much better quarter for the Aussie's as the persistent on-ball defensive pressure by Scott Kenny and Jesse Caspersz, assisted by Cody Ellis in the paint became an overwhelming factor for the Charter's. Young George Coe was unfortunately penalised by the referee's while playing some great defence, and being prematurely fouled out of the game. Phillips continued his running game getting some very helpful fast break scores. A set play formed by coach Sue See saw Zac Natoli throwing a touch-down pass straight into the rafters. (Zac made up for it with some determined 1 percenters) Oh, and rookie Todd (Jerry) Blanchfield threw down a massive dunk over two defenders to end the quarter. The Aussie's lead pushed out to 16.

The last quarter was very similar as the defensive pressure was continually applied by all. With the help of a great 3-point shooting exhibition from Sam Allen-3, Scott Kenny-1, and Jesse Caspersz-1 the Aussie's lead progressed. Many effective "quick hand" steals assisted in the boy's preferred fast running game. The game ending in a comfortable win for the Australian boy's!

SCORERS:

Phillips - 30, Allen - 9, McCallum - 8, Kenny - 7, Jenkins - 6, Caspersz - 5, Blanchfield - 4, Ellis - 4, Natoli - 2, Smith - 2, Huntington - 2, Coe.

Game 4 versus Woodrow Wilson High School, Portsmouth, Virginia

Women's Game

School Sport Australia 49 def. Woodrow Wilson High School 45

Wilson welcomed us into the Nanesmond River High gym as a 10-0 team this season. They did not expect to get the tough competition that they did. It was a very physical game and the referees let a lot go. To the Aussie girls credit they did not let the rough house tactics get to them.

The first quarter saw the Aussies jump Wilson to get a quick 8-0 lead. A Wilson timeout saw them settle and slowly work their way back into the game. Both teams moved the ball well in offence and created inside opportunities that were converted. The physical defence at both ends was dominating play. SSA 18 led Wilson 13 at quarter time.

The second period saw the teams continue the same game plan with Coach Spicer being able to get all eleven players onto the court. Ball reversal and strong cuts by the Aussies led to lay ups while at the other end Wilson was standing up and shooting from range. Both teams traded baskets and continued to play tough physical defence. 31-27 at the half!

As has been the trend in all our games, the opposition came out well after half time. They lifted the intensity and created early turn overs which led to quick scores. The Aussies gave up their lead but thanks to some tough inside work were able to keep themselves in the game. Wilson went to 3-quarter time leading 43-40.

Coach Spicer changed up the defence to a 1-3-1 zone and Wilson were completely lost. They scored 2 points early and that was to be their only score. From 5.43 to 2.05 on the clock they did not get a shot away. A fantastic last quarter by Burke, Hirons and Vella with great leadership from Cameron saw the Aussies tough out a great 4 point win.

Coach Brad Spicer was very pleased with the girls' efforts, especially considering no fouls were called and it was extremely physical. "This team is a pleasure to coach as they have a great attitude.....oh and they are 4 and 0!"

SCORERS:

Burke - 16, Vella - 9, Hirons - 9, C.Browne - 4, Short - 3, Lobb - 2, Wallis - 2, A.Browne - 2, Cameron - 2, Natoli, Priestly.

Game 4 versus Carolina Prep Academy, Durham, North Carolina

Men's Game

School Sport Australia 72 lost to Carolina Prep Academy 75

What an entertaining game of basketball. This game went down to the last play and was heartache again for the Aussie Boys. They played a team of year 13 students who were very athletic and with a style of basketball worth watching. The trash talk was non stop mainly about their game. It continually made the crowd laugh or 'sigh' in awe of their basketball athleticism.

Like the previous games the Aussie started well controlling the game but having trouble putting scoreboard pressure on their opponents. In all their games so far their finishing off close to the basket has let them down and this game was heading that way early. Trade mark defence made sure their opponents weren't doing any damage. 17 all at the quarter!

The standard of the gym, poor lighting and lino flooring, played on the Aussies minds and they continued to do everything except put the ball in the hole. Coach Sue See had used all 12 players by half time and a couple steals just before the break gave the Aussies a 7 point lead at the main break. 33-26.

As we saw last night a three point barrage by Montague and Birins from the Prep Academy, got them back into the game. Natoli was controlling the floor and some big baskets by Blanchfield along with slashing drives by Phillips and Caspersz saw the Aussie hold onto their lead going into the fourth quarter. 55-51 at three quarter time!

The fourth period opened well with the Aussies extending their lead to 10 on the back of Huntington and Caspersz making baskets close to the hole. The game turned on its head from here. One of the referees was Cal Bruton's brother in law. With a foul count of 14-4 in last quarter the Aussies found it difficult to adjust to the local calls and in the end this cost them. Birins and Montague drained threes from the car park, and then stopped the clock sending the Aussies to the line for one and ones which were missed. 70 all with 30 seconds left Natoli made 2 foul shots but Prep Academy responded with drive down the middle with 8 seconds left. The Aussies ran an inside play for Ellis that bobbed out was tapped back but ended up out of court as the clock ran out. OT but wait the refe's put 2.4 seconds back on the clock much to lots of Aussie objections. Birins in - bound the ball from our baseline, got it back took 2 dribbles to the centreline and drained the pray. Another heart breaking loss!

SCORERS:

Caspersz - 12, Huntington - 11, Blanchfield - 10, Phillips - 10, Allen - 8, McCallum - 6, Ellis - 4, Natoli - 4, Smith - 4, Jenkins - 2, Kenny, Coe - DNP.

Game 3 versus WJ Keenan High School, Columbia, South Carolina

Women's Game

School Sport Australia 66 def. WJ Keenan High School 46

The Australian Girls began the game against WJ Keenan High School with tough defensive stops and fast transition leading to open looks at the basket. They managed to keep the opposition scoreless while going on a 19 point run themselves to finish the first quarter, 19-0.

In the second quarter, the WJ Keenan Girls found their confidence and proceeded to match basket for basket with the Australian girls. The score at half time read 35-17. After regrouping at half time with their minds set on the task, the Aussies blew the score out in the third quarter by making use of their depth and teamwork. We were able to play hard defensively knowing that we would have good rotations, and push the ball up the floor finishing extremely well. The fourth quarter saw some tough calls go against the Aussies as the game became increasingly physical. But to the players credit they continued to get back up after being knocked down. The final score was 66-46 in Australia's favour.

The top scorers for the game were Amy Browne and Teagan Burke with 12 points each, however it was our ability to share the ball around and make smart passes as a team which won us the game.

SCORERS:

A.Browne - 12, Burke - 12, Lobb - 8, Wallis - 6, Vella - 6, Hirons - 5, Short - 5, C.Browne - 4, Cameron - 4, Natoli - 2, Priestly - 2.

Men's Game

School Sport Australia 64 lost to WJ Keenan High School 66

Wow what a game! With half a dozen College scouts sitting in the stands and a very parochial home crowd cheering, the atmosphere was great. The Aussies got away to a good start and their pressure defence forced the WJ Keenan guards to turn it over. 17-12 at quarter time.

The second quarter was much of the same except that both teams were having trouble converting. The big's in McCallum, Huntington and Ellis were dominating inside but just couldn't finish off. A couple quick steals and easy lay ups saw the Aussies take a 13 point lead into the main break. 37-24 at half time.

Failing to shut down the main Keenan scorers after half time and costly turnovers saw the lead evaporate. With the Keenan guards draining threes from everywhere the Aussies stumbled and found it had to stop their momentum. Who said home court isn't an advantage? This game has just gone up a notch and at three quarter time scores are locked at 49.

The Keenan No.12 guard drained a couple of huge threes and then they backed off into a zone which the Aussies had trouble breaking down. Enter Jesse Caspersz who made some big plays scoring 10points down the stretch to get the game to 64 all inside the last 30 seconds. A foul with 7 seconds left saw Keenan step to the line and make the 2 free throws. One last play saw the Aussies get the ball to Ellis for the game winner but it rimmed out. Whew what a high school game!

SCORERS:

Caspersz - 15, Ellis - 12, Coe - 7, McCallum - 6, Huntington - 4, Kenny - 4, Natoli - 4, Phillips - 4, Allen - 2, Jenkins - 2, Blanchfield - 2, Smith - 2.

Game 2 versus Forsyth Country Day School, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Women's Game

School Sport Australia 64 def. Forsyth Country Day School 33

Forsyth Country Day School opened the game with a quick score. The first quarter was tight with both teams applying defensive pressure. At the end of the quarter the Australian team was leading 12-10.

In the second quarter the Australian girls made a lot of basic mistakes, but through hard work at the defensive end of the floor the Australians were able to open up a lead of 13 points at the half. The defensive pressure created many fast break opportunities for the Aussies. At the half Margaret Harvey from Forsyth Country Day School lead all scorers with 8 points. Margaret has signed a letter of intent to play basketball at Wake Forest Division 1 College in 2008/09.

The Aussie girls returned after the half time break mentally switched on and physically ready to play. Defensive assignments were set for Courtney Browne and Ashley Hirons as they shut down Margaret Harvey who finished the game with 13 points. The Aussies girls began to run the lanes very well and create numerous scoring opportunities. Ashleigh Vella, Amy Browne and Dannii Natoli finished off well for the Aussies under pressure. The game turned physical and the Australian girls accepted the challenge. Scoring for the Australians was evenly spread.

An excellent all round effort from the Australian girls. The team is in high spirits and looking forward to their next game.

SCORERS:

Vella - 13, A.Browne - 9, Natoli - 9, Burke - 8, Lobb - 6, Wallis - 5, C.Browne - 4, Cameron - 3, Hirons - 3, Short - 2, Priestly - 2.

Men's Game

School Sport Australia 61 def. Forsyth Country Day School 44

Game 2 of this tour saw the men's team playing a very skilful and well organised team from Forsyth Country Day School just 20 miles up the road from Duke University. Early on the intensity was very evident from both teams as there were lots of mistakes. Both teams had trouble scoring and defence was dominating the play at both ends of the court.

Coach Sue See rotated his players a lot trying to find the right combination but nothing seem to work. Some great work under the ring from Cody Ellis dragging in rebounds and blocking shots at will. If, only they could score at the other end! Down 16 to 17 just before half time things seem to click into place. A 6 – 0 run gave the Aussie men a 5 point lead at the break. The pressure they were applying in defence forced Forsyth to cough up the ball 3 times leading to easy lay - ups.

A half time roast from the coach saw the team's intensity and focus improve after half time and those missed shots became made ones. A 15 – 0 run saw the lead extended to 20. This team seems to thrive on running and they were able to cause turn overs and allow easy baskets at the other end.

Jesse Caspersz, George Coe, Sam Allen, Rob Huntington and Cody Ellis were the combination that caused all the problems for Forsyth.

Having successfully achieved the major break in the game the Aussies controlled the rest of the game. Forsyth started to get their offence rolling but were only able to trade baskets. The final margin of 17 points was very satisfying considering the Forsyth sits second in its AA high school conference.

Bring on W J Keenan High School in South Carolina tomorrow!

SCORERS:

Huntington – 9, Caspersz – 8, Phillips – 6, Allen - 6, Jenkins – 6, Blanchfield – 6, Ellis – 5, Coe – 5, Smith – 4, McCallum – 3, Kenny – 3, Natoli.

Game 1 versus Robert E Lee High School, Staunton, Virginia

Women's Game

School Sport Australia 76 def. Robert E. Lee High School 41

For most of the girls this is their first trip to America. We came here not knowing what to expect and our first impressions of American high school basketball were overwhelming. The school stadium was filled with people on two fold out grand stands either side of the court and when the warm-up music filled the stadium all the girls started to get excited for the unknown contest.

Both teams got off to a slow start in the opening 8 minutes. Australia dominated the second quarter and outscored the Lee Ladies 27 to 7. Ashley Hirons led the assault with 14 points in the period. Australia's man to man defence took Lee out of its offence and centres Emma Lobb and Sarah Short totally negated any offence from the Lee ladies inside the key. Lee scored just 2 buckets from the paint in the first half.

"Their size really bothered us," Lee player Gray admitted. "We have never played a whole team with size like that. I was defending guards all night who were 5 -9 and I'm only about 5-4."

"That's the best team that Australia have brought here," said Lee assistant coach Larry Thornton. "They could really run the court and the man-to-man defence was very good. We battled and played hard and I thought we played better in the second half."

Hirons and 5-11 forward Ashleigh Vella led us with 18 points each. Despite the loss, Lee saw the game as a learning experience. "Playing against a team with that kind of size will help us, especially our inside players."

From Australia's perspective we played a fantastic game considering we had just travelled 30 hours to get here along with a 5 hour bus trip before the game. We have only had two training sessions and are beginning to come together really well. We are extremely excited and looking forward to our next games!

SCORERS:

Hirons – 18, Vella – 18, Burke – 11, Natoli – 7, Lobb – 6, Priestly – 5, Wallis – 4 Short – 2, Cameron – 2, A.Browne – 2, C.Browne – 1.

Men's Game

School Sport Australia 68 def. Robert E. Lee High School 42

The men's first hit out was against an extremely talented and successful boys program, which consisted of several regional championships along with national state championships. The boys faced a rather intense build up to the game, as most of the Australian men's team lacked international experience. With a packed house consisting of around about 1000 plus seating, the boys were understandably nervous before the game.

Right from the tip off the intensity of the game was played at a very high level. Scoring was hard to come by early on until the Australian team picked up the level of their game late in the first quarter with hard running and smooth passing. The Australian team went into the quarter time break leading 17-5.

The second quarter proved to be a crucial part of the game for the Aussies as their defence kept their opponents to only 3 points for the quarter. With some smart offence and great support coming off the bench Australia went into the Halftime leading 28 – 8.

The third quarter showed Australia's never give up attitude and punished their opponents every opportunity they could muster. With Robert E. Lee's undefeated season slowly slipping away, supporters raised their voices trying to get something out of their home team. This didn't worry the Australians one bit as they extended their lead once again finishing the third quarter 27 points in front (46-19)

As Australians complete dominance of the game was just too overwhelming for some of the fans in the fourth quarter which started with the thousand seat stadium only half full. As the game was out of reach for home team the Australians dropped their intensity and easily finished the game winning 68-42

Highlights of the game were Drew Phillips scoring 18 points which consisted of some hard running and athletic play. Special mentions to Cody Ellis/Vice captain who was enormous around the ring pulling down 13 boards (6 offensive) and 9 blocks. Zac Natoli/Captain was extremely solid in the back court finishing the game with 11 assists.

The Australian team was very impressive and were very proud to represent their country; this earned them respect from everyone who witnessed their game.

SCORERS:

Phillips – 18, Kenny – 8, Jenkins – 8, Blanchfield – 7, Huntington – 6, Caspersz – 6, Ellis – 4 McCallum – 4, Smith – 4, Natoli, Coe.