



PHOTO: Kangaroo Photos

POSTING UP: Carly Perso starred with 12 points in Vic Country's 57-46 win over Tasmania.

Carly shines on big stage

Perso shrugs off leg injury to star for Vic Country at national championships

By SCOTT ANDERSON

WANGARATTA'S Carly Perso has returned from the Basketball Australia Under 16 National Championships a more confident, and accomplished, player.

Despite heading into the championships, which were staged at Tamworth from July 7-14, under an injury cloud, Perso stood tall for the Victoria Country side, averaging 5.3 points and 5.1 rebounds in eight matches.

Perso struggled to shake off a leg injury in the lead up to the championships, but didn't let it affect her play.

"Basically my calf just seized up from overuse," she said.

"It was hard, but it was the national championships, so I wasn't going to let it stop me.

"It was pretty painful at times, but it was a good sort of pain because I was so excited about playing.

"I just have to take a month off now to let it recover."

Perso put in some strong displays, scoring nine points and pulling down 13 re-

bounds in an 83-41 thrashing of Western Australia Country, recording 12 points, three rebounds, two steals and a block in the 57-46 win over Tasmania, and finishing with seven points and five offensive boards in a 14-point triumph over South Australia Metro.

"I was happy with the way I played," Perso said.

"Those three were my best games.

"The main area I've improved in is my strength in the key and my posting up.

"A lot of the girls were my height and taller, and very strong, so I had to be able to stand up to them."

Vic Country was one of the standout teams throughout the tournament, finishing second in Pool 2 after winning five out of six matches.

Moving into the semi-finals, Vic Country was desperately unlucky to go down to Queensland South by five points in a match that could have gone either way.

That loss sent Vic Country into the bronze medal match, where it faced NSW Metro. But after dominating the

first half and leading heading into the final term, the side was overrun, with NSW guard Tahlia Tupaea starring with 16 points, seven rebounds and five steals.

"That was a tough match to lose," Perso said.

"We really wanted to win a medal and we were in front for just about the whole game.

"They got right up on us in the last quarter and played a full court defensive press, and we just made turnover after turnover.

"Tahlia was definitely the difference - she's a very good player.

"It was so hard not winning a medal - we were really disappointed.

"But I think we played awesome basketball and gelled really well as a team.

"To come fourth overall in the country is pretty good, and the coach was happy with how we played.

"I had the best week ever - everything I learned and added to my game, and just getting to spend the week with the rest of the girls, it was amazing."

Mission accomplished for Bannerman and Vic Country girls

By SCOTT ANDERSON

WHILE they missed out on a medal, it was mission accomplished for the Victoria Country girls at last week's Basketball Australia Under 16 National Championships.

The side finished fourth overall, but wasn't far off the pace set by medalists Victoria Metro, Queensland South and New South Wales Metro.

Vic Country won five of its six pool matches, with its only loss a 68-44 defeat at the hands of NSW Metro.

They thrashed the likes of QLD North, WA Country and New Zealand, while Tasmania and SA

Metro both put up a fight.

The pool results put Vic Country into the top four, and they went up against undefeated QLD South, which had recorded a shock win over Vic Metro in round one, in the semi-finals.

In a match that was neck-and-neck the whole way through, the QLD girls triumphed by five points, 61-56.

Assistant coach Jason Bannerman said Vic Country was outmuscled.

"It was a real battle," he said.

"They had some big, strong girls in the key who made a difference.

"But we were down by one point with a minute and a half to go, so that tells you how close it was."

QLD South went on to meet Vic Metro in the gold medal match, with the southern girls taking out the national title with a nail-biting 53-50 victory.

Meanwhile, Vic Country met NSW Metro in the bronze medal contest.

It was a true game of two halves, as Vic Country came out firing early.

They led 22-13 at the first change, and increased their buffer out to 14 points by halftime.

But the NSW side proved too strong in the end, dominating the second half to come away with the medal, winning 62-52.

"Our bigger girls just ran out of legs in the end," Bannerman said.

"But there was no disappointment whatsoever.

"I think it was a realisation of just how close we are.

"To go from a 24-goal loss against NSW Metro early in the week to leading for most of the final was one of the main positives to come out of it."

Bannerman was rapt with the efforts of local star Carly Perso, who averaged 5.3 points and 5.1 rebounds per match throughout the tournament.

"Carly got better and better the

longer it went on," he said.

"By the end she was really being utilised as one of the main go-to girls.

"Every time she came on the court she had an impact, and in one of the matches she had 13 rebounds.

"The improvement of all the girls from their initial selection, through the training camps and up to the finals was amazing.

"I don't think any of them realised what they were going to be up against when they first came in, but to see them grasp that, and to be part of such a good group of young athletes was the best part of the whole experience for me."