

The Screaming Eagle

Talks to new Eagle's Youth League and Under 16 Coach Nathan Cooper-Brown



Screaming Eagle

There's always a bit of a buzz in the air when a new coach comes along. And this year is no different with the Eagles being lucky enough to snare gun coach Nathan Cooper-Brown. Most of us don't know that much about him so The Screaming Eagle requested an interview with Nathan, better known as Coops, and was fortunate to catch up with him recently for a chat.

Thanks for taking the time to talk to me Coops, it seems you are jumping right into the deep end, coaching both the Youth League men in the Senior Championship program the Under 16 boys in the Junior Championship program. Pretty daunting stuff, but we'll get to that in a moment. First I thought you might like to share with us a bit about your background. Where did it all start for Nathan 'just call me Coops' Cooper-Brown?

Nathan Cooper-Brown (Coops)

I started playing sport as a kid, like most kids do and I was lucky enough to enjoy a fantastic playing career with a lot of opportunities afforded me. I made emergency for Vic Metro under 18's who were National Champs in 1999 and also went to ITC. I was also lucky to attend a good sporting school at Wesley College who were the APS champions 1998 and 1999.

Screaming Eagle

Hyphenated surname and went to Wesley College, hmmm, let me think about that for a minute! So you clearly played rep ball, who did you play for and how did you go?

Coops

Haha sounds a bit proper doesn't it. I started my junior basketball with the Coburg Giants playing under 14's where my success was limited to an elbow jump shot, then when I got to high school my best mate convinced me to move to Sandringham Sabres. Here, through a lot of hard work, I was able to enjoy some success, representing the club in VC, joining the Men's VBL team as an under 16 player, and in under 18's was honoured to win the Robert Lunardon Award (as club champion). Then I played my final junior season at Nunawading Spectres, enjoying a win and MVP award at the Bendigo tournament. Overall this was an incredibly enjoyable time in my basketball career.

Screaming Eagle

Did you play any other sports as a kid?

Coops

I played both basketball and cricket competitively as a kid, and like most youngsters was eventually forced to make a choice. I was a fast bowler with the firsts cricket team at school but wasn't too handy with the bat, so would bowl my ten overs, then go to the basketball court and leave the 12th man to bat for me haha. I think basketball was always the right choice for me in the end.

Screaming Eagle

What about after school, did you continue playing?

Coops

Yea I played for Nunawading in the SEABL competition and also Sandringham in Big V in 2002 in a championship year and runners up in 2003, both against Shepparton. That was a pretty good team.

Screaming Eagle

In preparation for this interview I had a look at the stats from those two years, you didn't do too badly for a mug punter having a run around haha! Clearly you were a shooter and didn't mind having a chuck from down time from time to time. And might I say with a better than fair degree of success too.

Coops

They were a couple of really fun series, we developed quite a rivalry against Shepparton and every time we played them it turned into a shootout, and like any "decent" young player I thought I was the next Chris Mullin and made sure I threw up enough 3's to prove it, it took me a long time to realise I was much more affective taking charges and grabbing rebounds haha.

Screaming Eagle

I read you had a shot at the big time in the NBL, how did that go?

Coops

Yea, I had a crack with the Victoria Titans in the NBL, this was a dream come true. I ended up on the squad for around three years mainly running offences that the team would play against the next round, but after about a year, I was starting to make a mark, form a relationship with both the players and the coaches and was provided more opportunities with the team, including the strength and conditioning program, joining the second team in practice, and then capped off with suiting up for 3 pre-season games. I came close to a contract twice but unfortunately never made the roster. This was a true highlight, I played some of my best basketball when I was with the Titans, plus was able to take things away that I use in my coaching today, but I guess that happens when you play for, and are around amazing coaches in Brian Goorjian, Kevin Goorjian, Guy Molloy and Lori Chizik.

Screaming Eagle

I also read you went to college in the USA, tell me about that.

Coops

You've done some homework, correct I went to Dominican University of California studying Graphic Art, and I was awarded both a basketball and academic scholarship. I was at DU for almost three years, this was one of the best life experiences I ever had, and would recommend it for any young player and always thank the people involved for giving me that opportunity. In terms of basketball, I had never worked so hard, we had a coaching staff that was extremely strict and consistently ran us to breaking point so that in the second half we would know how to play tired. Again I was a bit lucky to be in a great team, and a bond that was built meant that we went back to back in the Cal Pac Championships in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 so that was pretty special. That meant that both years we made the national tournament. The atmosphere of a 32 team single elimination event, with thousands of college students and fans screaming mostly at you, and sometimes for you, was something else; I don't think my body's ever produced more adrenaline haha.

College in the US was such a change in lifestyle, living on campus, having all the students know your name, coming up and saying hi, and studying and playing basketball at the same time was a juggling act, and a lot of late nights! Plus being in the States meant that we were exposed to so much basketball on the TV and in the papers. Being a basketball nut, I was like a kid in a candy store. It was a truly wonderful experience.

Screaming Eagle

Overall, not a bad playing career in anyone's language, can you quickly summarise it and tell me any real highlights?

Coops

I was lucky in my basketball career because I got to play alongside some gifted and dedicated athletes and play for some brilliant coaches, and it's a time I will always look back on with joy. A couple of highlights stick in my mind. Winning a bronze medal in the old great Australian shoot out for an ITC team was great, it was a really competitive tourney and I was able to contribute to a team of incredibly talented players. Another was my two conference championships at university in the States, those campaigns were such gruelling hard work making the success that much sweeter and they are something I'll never forget.

Screaming Eagle

You mention coaches, was moving into coaching just a natural transition for you? Or did you spend some time out, how did your coaching career begin?

Coops

I got into coaching because I loved the game, and it was another avenue to be involved in the game. I loved working with kids and seeing those eureka moments they get when something you are teaching clicks and they enjoy success. It wasn't long before I was hooked and realised I had a better career ahead of me as a coach rather than a player. The coaching sprouted a teaching career path and in turn the teaching skills have helped on the basketball floor, I love coaching and teaching, it's a real passion.

After college I was burnt out and lost the passion to play, the connection that you form with a team in the college system is unrivalled here at home and I found it difficult to put my body on the line for teammates that didn't care about me. I had done plenty of coaching before I left for the States in Sandringham junior camps, a variety of junior skills camps and Wesley College year 7 and 8 teams

amongst others, but after I got back I found that this is where I was able to continually be successful, be around the game I loved and give something back. I moved back into the club system and then got involved with coaching for BV.

Screaming Eagle

So you've started coaching, what, where and how did you go?

Coops

My first team was the under 14 VC team at Sandringham, and some of those players like to remind me about the push ups I made them do once at half time of a game, as I didn't think we were performing as we should've been haha, I have changed a lot since then.

Screaming Eagle

Pushups at half time, I reckon I can name ten kids in the 16/1's who just had a heart attack!! Did you have any success along the way?

Coops

A couple of coaching highlights to date include a second place finish with a Victorian team at the inaugural SCC, and the biggest highlight for me was winning a Gold Medal at Nationals as Development Coach to Ross Clark (and the Vic metro Under 16's).

Screaming Eagle

Ross Clark, now there's a familiar name and one who I interviewed recently. I gather you know Ross pretty well?

Coops

Absolutely, Ross has been a fantastic mentor for me and I owe him a lot, it's great now being at the same club as him, and I really hope I enjoy the same success with the under 16's that he has had.

Screaming Eagle

Knowing Ross is one thing, packing up your bags and making a career move to come to Diamond Valley is another. Tell me about the move across.

Coops

I decided to move to Diamond Valley (even though I live in Highett haha) because of Al McAughtry, Ross being here was just a bit of a sweetener. I have been lucky enough to get to know Al through work with BV and I'm one of his biggest fans, what he has done with both the club and his players is something special and I look forward to learning the secrets of his success from the man himself. Al also was great in laying out how he is able to help me achieve my goals as a coach and this was really important to me as I am incredibly ambitious. I am really looking forward to following Al's footsteps into coaching in the junior Australian program and hopefully one day maybe even the Boomers.

Screaming Eagle

Dreaming big, something Mr Eagle likes to see! So you've been at Diamond Valley five minutes, what are your first thoughts of the place?

Coops

I love it! Everyone has made me feel so welcome and there is a real family and supportive atmosphere, something that I think is essential to the progress of any basketball organisation. Plus, all the players I have worked with so far are not only talented but incredibly hard working and unselfish, and when you start with players with that attitude and work ethic, success isn't far away. I look forward to contributing to the success of the Eagles for many years to come.

Screaming Eagle

You're taking the Youth League men and the under 16's coaching positions at Diamond Valley, previously coached by a couple of very celebrated coaches in Trevor Lee and Ross Clark respectively. You must feel a little nervous, for want of a better word, in following these guys.

Coops

Very nervous! But I feel that the nerves are representative of my desire to win, and prove to the club that I was the right appointment to follow on from two fantastic coaches.

Screaming Eagle

You've already selected your under 16 team, tell me about the team you've picked.

Coops

We are small! Haha but we are fast, and that's worked out well for me as my style of play revolves around an up tempo style, combined with pressure defence. We have a nice combination of experience with Nathan Smarelli having played VC for Ross last season, and excited youth with two bottom agers keen to make contributions in Ryan Bowkett and Nick Barrow. All the boys that I have selected have already started to show me something in our sessions and practice games, in terms of their desire to move the ball, run hard and look out for one another. I can honestly say I have never been more excited about a junior team in my career and can't wait to get the season underway and really see what these boys can do.

Screaming Eagle

Mr Eagle took a little peak at your training recently, I didn't see that much of it, but one word jumped into my head as I watched you ply your trade and that was discipline. Is that something you are conscious of, or is it just a natural thing for you to bring into your coaching?

Coops

I think that has been ingrained in me over the years through the coaches I played for and the style I have developed. In saying that, I think it's imperative that we are disciplined and my players see that as soon as I take the floor. We have so much teaching to do in so little time that good discipline allows us to be more affective with our time on the floor.

Screaming Eagle

You'll be working with our Senior Championship Men's coach Warren Estcourt, have you come across each other before?

Coops

I have met Warren a few times in the past. He's a great guy, and I have also played against him a few times as well, I remember Warren being a skilled player and a fiery competitor, and being a competitor is essential to being a successful coach. I look forward to continue to develop a relationship with him, learning what I can, and helping him and the program win.

Screaming Eagle

Some people would have a high expectation of how the Youth League team will go given its previous success under Steve Smith and Trevor Lee, are you conscious of that, is it something you have put some thought into?

Coops

I don't think anybody has higher expectations than I do. I am conscious of the success those guys had in the past, but I'm not focused on the past, I'm focused on what I can do to make this team as successful as it can be, now, and in the future.

Screaming Eagle

So what can we expect game day from Nathan Cooper-Brown, are you a shouter and a screamer, a pacer or a ponderer? What can we expect to see from you on the bench?

Coops

I'm a shouting pacer all right, game day is THE day, and I make sure that I have done everything in my power to make sure the team is ready. Then I will continue to teach, instruct, point, scream and work my players from the sideline, it's such a fun time, I'm pretty animated.

Screaming Eagle

Tell me about your day job, what pays the bills 'cause I sure know it ain't basketball!!

Coops

Definitely not basketball haha! I am a high school art and design teacher, I mainly do casual relief teaching, which allows me a bit more freedom around my basketball schedule. I am blessed to have a job that I enjoy.

Screaming Eagle

Now for the pressure questions! Who was your best ever coach and why?

Coops

Brian Goorjian hands down. He has a true basketball mind. I got so much from playing under him, and watching him coach. His understanding of the intricacies of the game was extraordinary, plus he combined that high basketball IQ with an ability to manage players and form strong relationships with the people around him.

Screaming Eagle

Since coaching yourself, which three kids did you enjoy coaching the most and why?

Coops

Jack Watts (Sandringham under 14) – a true stud, even at a young age, so talented, but still coachable and modest. Great kid.

Tom Wilson (under 16 Vic Metro) – Gifted athlete, Tom is highly skilled and fluid on the court, and another player despite his gifts always willing to work and listen.

Dejan Vasseljevic (under 16 Vic Metro) – a fun kid to be around, he has a great attitude and is a fantastic long range shooter for his age. A ton of potential.

Screaming Eagle

Interesting you would mention Jack Watts, when I interviewed Al McAughtry, he had him in his list as well! You mentioned playing with some great players in your playing days, which three players did you love to go to war with, not necessarily the best players but the ones you loved playing with?

Coops

David Moore – one of my best mates growing up, a willingness to win, kept his composure in any situation.

Marcus Williams – unrelenting guard/forward, a great leader, and one of the best players for his size I've ever seen.

Nathan Croswell – Great penetrator. He made me better.

Screaming Eagle

Can you pick the three absolute best players you ever played with and why?

Coops

David Moore – left handed gun, one of the best low post players I ever played with, un-guardable. All-American all four years of college, number retired at DU.

Darryl MacDonald – Dmac was just an exceptional point guard, unbelievable court vision and an ability to score. An NBL legend.

Andrew Bogut – Not as good back then as he is now, but a one in a million talent with great size, so happy to see him do so well.

Screaming Eagle

I usually finish with a question but being so new it might be difficult for you to answer but we'll have a go anyway. If you could magically click your fingers and have something done, changed, fixed and absolutely in place at Diamond Valley right now, what would it be (don't be afraid to dream big)?

Coops

A state of the art 10,000 seat stadium with attached practice facility, equipped with gym, recovery pool, physio room, lavish locker rooms, and game tape cinema...that would be nice.

Screaming Eagle

Now that's what I call dreaming big!! I've been lucky to been able to interview some great people within the Diamond Valley community and enjoyed every single one for different reasons, and this was no different. A new coach within our midst and people saying who is this guy? Well now we know.

Thanks Coops for being so giving of your time to tell us your story. It sounds like the season ahead for the under 16's and the Youth League will be one led by a ton of experience, plenty of discipline and a whole lot of fun.

Nathan Cooper-Brown, The Screaming Eagle salutes you.