

SPORT

Bloods go back-to-back

By Michael Doran

Olinda Ferny Creek has triumphed again, winning back-to-back Premierships in the AFL Yarra Ranges Division 1 A-Grade Netball.

The Bloods defeated Belgrave 58 to 51 goals and have now won a remarkable three out of the last four A-Grade flags.

In his first year as the team's coach, Tim Smith brought in a high-performance program based on his experience in the Victorian Netball League. "We pushed the girls outside their comfort zone, sometimes into the unknown, but we did it in a safe environment," Smith said.

"I call it having an unconditional belief in your athletes. "We have a very close group in the team and we are also a very close club.

"We introduced a high-performance environment and focused on both the technical and tactical aspects of our game.

"Part of the challenging process was to move players into new positions, such as Elli Stewart who shifted from goal shooter into goal attack.

"These are high-end athletes so to keep them learning in a collaborative environment brings out their best." The teams met four times in 2018 for two wins each, but the one that really mattered belonged to Olinda Ferny Creek.

Olinda's Peri Stewart top-scored with 37 goals, 15 of them coming in the second quarter to set up the win after scores were level at quarter time.

Lauren Bennett led the way for Belgrave with 22 goals and the best on court award went to Brodie Smith of Olinda Ferny Creek.

The team summoned up some well-known Bloods spirit to overcome serious knee injuries to experienced players that threatened to derail their season.

Smith is already looking forward to having these players back in 2019 and building on this year's success.

With such a professional program in place it would seem a three-peat is not out of the question for Olinda Ferny Creek's netballers.



Olinda Ferny Creek go back-to-back in 2018.

Picture: GREG CARRICK