For Aloha, It’s A Slam Dunk

Team Aloha, the all-star girls basketball squad that I’ve organized and sponsored for 13 years now, earned its second consecutive championship title at the Elite Is Earned Spring Invitational girls basketball tournament, held in late April in Walnut Creek, California. We posted a perfect 4-0 record during the three-day event. Last year, the squad had a 5-0 record in capturing the crown.

The highly competitive tournament, which included another team from Hawai‘i — Proformance, which is coached by former ‘Iolani basketball stars Derrick Low and Kyle Pape — was sanctioned by the NCAA, meaning nearly 100 college coaches and scouts were in attendance.

This was Team Aloha’s fourth overall championship; the girls were runners-up on four other occasions. Overall, our athletes have won nearly 80 percent of their contests.

Team Aloha 2019 consisted of nine underclassmen: three seniors, four sophomores and two freshmen. In qualifying for the title match-up, the Hawai‘i girls posted preliminary round victories against Salt Lake Metro Black of Utah, 58-22; Portland’s Northwest Stars Navy, 64-52; and 90TEN Team Black of Washington, 52-25.

In the championship game against a talented Washington Swarm squad, Team Aloha earned a 53-48 come-from-behind win. Caiyle Kaupu of Konawaena led the team by earning a 53-48 come-from-behind win. Caiyle Kaupu of Konawaena led the team by

 Tanuvasa of Maryknoll combined for 26 points and coolly handled the Swarm’s pressure defense, which resulted in open looks and assists.

Overall scoring leaders for Team Aloha were Lily and Caiyle, who averaged 12 and 11 points per game, respectively, scoring from all over the court. Kelsie Imai of Waiākea and Kahuku’s Leialoha Naeta anchored the defense with their tenacious and gritty performances, while Lagi Su’a-Godinet of Kamehameha and Punahou’s Tatiana Burciaga-Reyes contributed timely minutes off the bench with their head’s-up play, and freshman Lishae Scanlan of Hanalani picked up valuable experience.

It speaks to the talent of our girls that they had very limited practice time (a little over two months every other weekend) as a team because they came from many different schools and islands — but they were nevertheless able to beat club squads that practice together throughout the season.

I’ve said time and time again that our girls can compete against the best in the nation, and our continued competitiveness shows the caliber of homegrown talent we have. It also bears mention that our participation in these sanctioned mainland tournaments has led to a number of our players coming to the attention of college recruiters. That’s been the case in past years, and this year as well.

Last year, Kamehameha’s Kalina Obrey and Kamalu Kamakawiwo’ole of Kalani caught the attention of coaches from San Jose State and Utah State at Walnut Creek, respectively, and led to their eventual signing with the two major college programs.

Previous Team Aloha members who were recruited by major Division I programs include Chanelle, Cherilyn and Celena Molina, and Lia Galdeira and Dawnyelle Awa of Konawaena. Galdeira holds the distinction of being the first and only individual from Hawai‘i drafted by the WNBA.

Other Division I prize recruiters include Shawna and Shaena Kuehu of Punahou, Jamie Smith and Kylie Maeda of ‘Iolani, Iwalani Rodrigues and Valerie Alama of Kalani, Kalei Adolfo of Moloka‘i, Maiki Viela and Malika Taufa of Lahainaluna, Tia Kanoa and Alohi Robins-Hardy of Kamehameha, Keisha Kane-koa of Honoka’a, Bella Cravens and Chayse Milne of Maryknoll, and Kiki Robertson of Mid-Pacific Institute.

Chris Hansen, managing editor of ProspectsNation.com and director of Elite Is Earned Basketball, told us, “For the second straight year, Team Aloha came to the Elite Is Earned Spring Invitational and proved how good the basketball is in Hawai‘i. Competing in a field with teams from eight states and two countries, coach Mufi and his staff have the team playing at a very high level in front of nearly 100 college coaches this weekend.

“Team Aloha plays a tough and fun style of basketball that fans and coaches loved to watch. In the championship game, they gritted out a tough win against the Washington Swarm, who have multiple players being recruited by Division I schools. It was an impressive showing.”

Assisting me were veteran girls prep basketball coaches Sherice Ajifu, Rodney Cavaco and Rodney Veary, who deserve kudos for the time they devoted to this endeavor.

Mahalo also to former Moanalua and UH Wāhine coach Dana Takahara-Dias, and Fran Villarmia-Kahawai and Mona Fa’asoa, who captured championships at ‘Aiea and Kaimukī, respectively. These women also helped immensely in developing Team Aloha into a quality sports experience for our local wāhine.

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