

## **Experience invaluable for Development Teams**

New Zealand Development Girls and Boys teams competed in the Friendship Series in Sydney from June 29 - July 3. New Zealand development teams have been travelling to the Friendship Series for several years. The tournament is used to introduce our young athletes to strong international competition and further develop their softball careers.

The girls had a solid start to the tournament but fell to some tough, more experienced teams. Head coach, Carl Tuinenga, thought that the team played well throughout the four days but failed to add some of the finishing touches required to win games.

“At times the team played very well - there are some really promising kids, however, they need to learn what the requirements are to play at this higher level.”

The Friendship Series is a crucial step for young players to be able to see what these requirements are first hand. “This was a learning experience for them and hopefully what they have learnt will be obtained and put into practice going forward”, says Tuinenga.

Tuinenga stated that while he thought each player had their moment, there were a few athletes that really stood out. “Lucy McIntyre batted .429 for the tournament and was a real standout.”

Meg Glading, Hayley Carter and Marama Makea also impressed. “Meg was our leadoff hitter and controlled things well behind the dish”, says Tuinenga. “Hayley did a good job leading the team as co-captain and Marama showed real potential for the future.”

Head coach of the Development Boys, Darryl Marino, felt that the boys showed plenty of character throughout the week and looked promising from the start.

The team finished in 2<sup>nd</sup> place behind an older Australia Green team, who they had beaten earlier in the week. Marino stated that the team did not offer any excuses but rather reflected positively on the way that they had performed.

“The boys exceeded expectations given the age of the team in relation to the Australian sides and the fact that New Zealand is in the off season”, says Marino.

Marino felt that there were many standout performances during the week. Three players were named in the tournament team, Jordan Tahana, Zac Boyd and Bailey MacDonald, with MacDonald also receiving MVP of the series.

As well as playing experience, the Friendship Series enables these young athletes to develop relationships with players from other regions of New Zealand. “Many of them arrived as strangers but left as great mates.”

“The experiences that the boys gained both on and off the diamond were positive ones that will hopefully guide them along the path to higher honours”, says Marino.