

Australian basketballers give thoughts on trip to Alton area

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – Basketball's international growth over the past couple of decades has attracted a good number of players across Australia; some of the best-known players like Luc Longley, Andrew Gaze and Patty Mills have played in the NBA, Longley most notably with the Chicago Bulls and Mills with the San Antonio Spurs; Gaze himself played on Seton Hall's 1989 NCAA finalist that lost to Michigan in the national championship game that year in Seattle.

The game's growth in Australia has continued since then, with players of every age level taking part in the game; a professional league, the National Basketball League, has been part of the Australian sporting culture for many years.

At the high school level, basketball continues to attract a good number of players. An team representing Trinity Grammar School, located near Sydney in the state of New South Wales, is currently touring the United States; the tour kicked off in the Chicago area and arrived in the Metro East on Thursday with a game against Marquette Catholic, followed by a Saturday game against Granite City.

Two of the Trinity players, Will Bonnaccorso and Ethan Bateman, talked about their experiences thus far on the tour and how they started playing the game following Thursday night's game against Marquette.

“It's been good and tiring,” Bonnaccorso, a 6-2 senior for Trinity, said of the trip following Thursday's game against the Explorers. “It's been a pretty good trip; it's been a big (time) difference, but we're adapting to it (there is currently a 17-hour time difference between Sydney and Alton, with parts of Australia, including Sydney, observing Australian daylight time and Alton on American Central Standard Time).”

The weather difference was also striking; Thursday's weather in Alton was chilly, with winter approaching; summer in Australia begins the same time as winter begin in the northern hemisphere. “It's really different,” Bonnaccorso said. “In Australia, it's summer.”

When asked what the best part of the trip had been up to that point, Bonnaccorso said “the atmosphere; you guys have a big court and a big gym. We have a big gym as well, but we don't get the atmosphere like you guys (with a large crowd on hand to support the Explorers and MCHS' Blue Crew cheer squad packing their section and a section on the stage behind one of the baskets near the Explorer bench cheering loudly all night); it's been really good.”

“It's been a really, really amazing experience,” said Bateman when asked what he thought about the trip to that point. “It's been really enlightening; for the boys, it's been a really big deal. It's been a learning experience for us both on and off the court – we're refining our skills on the court and learning how to carry ourselves off the court. It's taught me how to deal with really big crowds – that can make a big difference.

“It's a really nice area (the St. Louis area); we stopped off in the Springfield area on our way here, which was nice, but the most notable thing was the weather.”

When asked about the style of play in America as opposed to that in Australia, Bateman said “the most notable difference is there's no 24-second (shot) clock in America (Australian games are played under FIBA's international rules, which has a shot clock; the game Thursday was played under American high school rules, which does not have a shot clock); you end up playing defense for 40-50 seconds – it's strenuous.

“The shorter three-point line (which is 19-9 from the center of the basket at the apex while the three-point arc internationally is 20-6 from the center of the basket) – that's been really fun to adjust to, but it really clogs up the paint (three-second lane). Guys are so athletic here; the speed up and down the court, we find ourselves puffing about three or four minutes into the game.”

“Thanks to all the schools; it's been a really good pleasure,” Bonnaccorso said of the experience.

“Thanks to all the fans, all the people who come to our games and make basketball what it is,” Bateman said.

