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Campaign to boost skill levels



MATT Fitzgerald, Aussie Sport Skills co-ordinator for the Gunnedah area, putting young rugby league players from Gunnedah Public School through their paces yesterday. Back row, from left, Dylan Ireland, Blake Loker, Mitch Matthews, Kih McDonald, Tyler Silver, Matthew Keech. Front, from left, Daniel Lawlor, Hayden Smith, Kristopher Lodge, Dylan Winsor, Nick Smyth, Shannon Haines and Isaac Keeler.

A GRASSROOTS campaign has uncovered a wealth of potential among young Gunnedah rugby league footballers.

The Aussie Sport Skills program has been under way in Gunnedah since early February and will culminate in a Rugby League Sports Carnival Week at Gunnedah's Kitchener Oval from Thursday, May 8 to Saturday, May 10.

The promotion has the backing of the NRL (National Rugby League) and will be attended by league legends Graham Eadie, Larry Corowa and Steve Martin, who toured England in 1978 with the Kangaroos.

The program concentrates on developing the ball skills of youngsters, with emphasis on speed, ball movement and kicking.

St Xavier's, Gunnedah South and Gunnedah Public started out with squads of 30 young players, since refined to teams of nine which will play against each other on Saturday, May 10.

The groups have been working out under the eye of Aussie Sport Skills co-ordinator for the Gunnedah district, Matt Fitzgerald, who is pleased with the way the players have responded to the program.

"You can see their improvement from week to week," he said.

"They're full of enthusiasm and they are keen to develop new skills.

"League these days has to compete with rugby, AFL and soccer for numbers and programs like this give the game a huge boost."

At Gunnedah Public School yesterday, Fitzgerald and the school's Aboriginal liaison officer, Wayne Griffiths, were putting the school squad members through their paces.

The program at the school is being supported by the BHP Billiton Caroon Coal Project and Wayne Griffiths says it has already produced "quite a few benefits."

"The boys are tremendously keen to learn and the sponsorship has also enabled us to order some much-needed equipment.

"The results already speak for themselves with nine of our boys selected for regional trials."

Giants making the step up



GUNNEDAH Baseball Giants' President Jamie Eveleigh can't wait for the season to start on Saturday.

THE Gunnedah Baseball Giants will begin their 2008 Tamworth baseball tilt on Saturday against the Tamworth Knights.

This season the club will field three teams in the Tamworth-based competition in A, B and C grade.

It will be the first time a Gunnedah side has played in the A grade competition, after winning the B grade premiership the last two seasons and the C grade crown the last three consecutive years.

The club's have been bolstered in the off-season by a number of new signings with Bon Winsor and Brad Hamilton headlining the stock of new players.

Giants club president Jamie Eveleigh will take the reins of the top grade side again this season and is looking forward to the new challenge of A grade in Tamworth.

"I can't wait and neither can the other players," Eveleigh said.

"It's going to be a big challenge going up from B grade - it's a big jump.

"Everyone will have to be playing at their best if we are going to be competitive this season."

For the first time in eight years, the club will also host home matches.

Two new diamonds have been constructed at the Donnelly Fields by the club and Gunnedah Shire Council.

"We'll have our first home game in the second round against the Tamworth Cougars," Eveleigh said.

On Saturday, the B grade game starts at 1pm, followed by A and C grade at 2.45pm.

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