

Lees steels himself for world domination

Werribee's Jason Lees will don the green and gold of Australia at the IWRF Wheelchair Rugby World Championships in Sydney next month.

A two-time Paralympic gold medallist, it will be Lees' third world championships in the Australian Steelers team.

Lees will join an 11-strong team aiming to become the first wheelchair rugby team to win a world championship on home soil.

If recent history is any guide, the Steelers will be one of the favourites to take out the title.

The Steelers are two-time defending Paralympic champions in London 2012 and Rio 2016 and reigning world champions in Odense 2014.

No team has ever had such a dominant four-year period in international wheelchair rugby.

"I'm stoked to be selected for my third world championships," Lees said.

"What we were able to do in Denmark [at the world championships in 2014] was pretty special and to be able to do that and have a



Jason Lees at a training camp with the Australian Steelers in Darwin. (Australian Paralympic Committee)

chance of doing that again at home will be an amazing experience.

"I'm really looking forward to it."

Lees is a stalwart of the Australian Steelers team, making his debut back in 2009.

He has just returned from Darwin, where the Steelers held their final training camp before the world championships.

It is a familiar routine for Lees, as the Steelers have trained in Darwin in the lead-up to all their major tournaments since 2012.

"Training in Darwin is a superstitious thing for [Australian coach] Brad [Dubberley]," Lees said. "He's brought us up here before big comps and it's worked in the past and I think he wants to keep it going."

"On court, the guys were firing. We had great hit-outs and everyone is playing really well."

"I think if we can play our best come Sydney, there won't be another team who can beat us."

The 12-team tournament will be played at Sydney Olympic Park.

The competition will consist of two pools of six teams with Australia set to meet Japan, Sweden, New Zealand, Denmark and Ireland in the qualifying rounds and Team USA, Canada, Great Britain, France, Columbia and Poland battling it out in the other pool.

The opening ceremony and first pool game will be played on Sunday.

Lance Jenkinson



IN THE DOGHOUSE

■ Like it or loathe it, there are rule changes coming to Aussie rules football. I do think the game at the elite level has some issues to deal with, it can be excruciating to watch at times. Then you get games like the recent Geelong v Melbourne or Richmond v Collingwood – a great spectacle and an enthralling contest. I have switched off a lot of games this year for several reasons including poor skills, one-sided contests, cringeworthy, unintelligent commentary and a game of little consequence or interest. The AFL was looking at introducing some rule changes in several of the final games of the season that have no bearing on finals spots. This is not going to happen and rightly so. There is another suggestion to do the trial at VFL level, which is incredibly arrogant, and dismissive of a competition that has been around since 1877. The AFL might run the game but a direction of this kind, to any other competition, is nothing short of bullying. Personally, I want to see more kicking and marking in our game at all levels. The less it looks like rugby, and executes like soccer, the better it is to watch. I love both soccer and rugby league but a hybrid of the three codes has little interest for me as a spectator. There is nothing in the AFL rules that can make bad teams play well. I am not sure if that problem is fixable. Also, did anyone else notice the most likely rule change is the 6-6-6 rule? Hope it does not favour the Demons too much.

■ WRFL junior finals start this week, a great reward for all players involved, as well as the coaches, volunteers, club officials and the parents. It is also a timely reminder that it is a game, and winning and losing is part and parcel of what happens. Scenes of ugly parent and crowd behaviour in recent years has detracted from the achievements of the children playing the game. This is a time for celebration, regardless of the result of the game. There is no excuse for anti-social behaviour. Also a reminder to the players to win with humility and lose with dignity. Be ultra competitive but shake hands at the end and savour the moment, there is no guarantee you will be there again.

■ In the seniors, many are still talking about the Hoppers Crossing comeback last week, almost doubling its score in the last quarter to share the points with Werribee Districts. Earlier in the year one point separated the teams. Can't wait to see if they meet in the finals.

Kevin Hillier

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Recruit snatches victory

By Lance Jenkinson

New recruit Riel Mamur has boosted the spirits at the Truganina Hornets with a nifty late match-winning goal in a 1-0 victory over Bell Park in the Football Federation Victoria men's state league 4 at Arndell Park Reserve on Saturday.

Mamur came off the bench to play a heroic role in the Hornets win, casually chipping the goalkeeper in second half stoppage time to claim all three points for this team.

It was a pick-me-up the Hornets needed after coughing up a two-goal lead the week before in a draw with Altona North in a game when star striker Gabriele Di Fiore went down with a season-ending knee injury.

Mamur was only signed during the week on the back of the Di Fiore injury and he made an instant impact.

"I brought him in right at the last moment after my striker got injured," Hornets coach Sergio Lunedei said.

"He's an old player from the Hornets who has come and gone and decided to come back."

"First game, he came on off the bench and he put away the winner."

"It was a nice goal, a chip over the keeper."

The injury to Di Fiore was a major blow to Truganina's title hopes.

Di Fiore injured both his ACL and PCL in the one moment.

With eight goals in five matches, Di Fiore's absence will undoubtedly be felt, but this stirring victory will at least put a full stop to a terrible week for the Hornets.

It was a case of better late than never for the Hornets.

"Finally, we got the ball in, but it wasn't until the last minute of the match," Lunedei said.

"It's a good side, we respect them as a club, so it's unlucky for them, but that's how sport is."

While Truganina's front line was weakened by the Di Fiore injury, the return of central defensive pairing Ahmed Ahmed and Omar Sheikh in recent week will make them stronger at the back.

The Hornets kept a clean sheet for the first time in five weeks.

"It's the first time all season that I had all my defenders back and it showed a difference," Lunedei said.

It was perfect timing for Truganina with a blockbuster top-of-the-table clash with Western Eagles this Saturday at the Polish Sports and Recreation Complex.

Last time the two sides met, the Hornets were humiliated 8-0.



Ezekiel Nieves chases down the ball for Truganina Hornets. (Damjan Janevski)

"That game against Western Eagles, they were the stronger team and we had no defence, so they killed us," Lunedei said.

"We copped it on the chin and kept going, we're still fighting for that first spot."

Nine points behind with five rounds to go, Truganina must win if it has any chance of chasing down the Eagles on the ladder.

Meanwhile, Hoppers Crossing showed it has not given up hopes of survival in men's state league 1, upsetting local rivals Altona City 2-0 at Kim Reserve on Saturday night.

Simon Tolli and Liam McDermott found the back of the net for the Reds in an at times fiery

encounter. The Reds are three points adrift of the safety positions.

Point Cook had a horror day in men's state league 3, pounded 4-0 by FC Strathmore.

In women's state league 2, Hoppers Crossing moved a step closer to promotion with a 2-0 victory over Ballarat Eureka Strikers.

Star striker Julia Budiongo-Batota and captain Kelly Black scored for the Reds.

If the Reds can win at home against Fitzroy City, they will be going up next season.

In NPL 2 west, George Slefendorfas scored the game's only goal in Werribee City's 1-0 bounce back win over Nunawading City.