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Emerging Opals off to gold medal game

The Emerging Opals are off to the gold medal game at the World University Games after a pulsating 78-74 semi-final win over hosts Chinese Taipei at a packed Taipei Arena.

The team now has a day off before the gold medal game against Japan on Monday night, after the Rising Sun pulled off an upset win over Russia 84-63 in the other semi-final.

After a slow start, the young side hit the lead before half-time and despite being often headed were just as regularly in front as they withstood the furnace-like atmosphere provided by the 18,000-strong crowd and a determined home side who never gave in.

Big guns Lauren Scherf (Victoria University) and Darcee Garbin (James Cook University) fired for the Emerging Opals, with Scherf producing a game high 21 points with 17 rebounds, while Garbin bagged 18 points and 13 rebounds in a performance that has them well and truly marked for future senior representation.

Scherf said the atmosphere was intense, which made the win even sweeter.

"There was a massive crowd out there tonight going for Chinese Taipei," Scherf said.

"I'm just so happy for the girls that we stayed united and stayed in our bubble, but seriously, that crowd, oh my God, I've never witnessed anything like it," Scherf said.

"We just had to lock down in defence. I had one job. Play my game - get the rebounds, get in the post and score."

Head coach Chris Lucas was full of praise for his young side who only came together three weeks before the start of the tournament for a warm up series in Japan.

"Those girls really fought that game out, they got down a number of times but the character they showed was tremendous," Lucas said.

"We had to make some adjustments at half time, I was happy with how we were playing and they beat us on possession play which was something we were controlling and they had more rebounds than the previous games which concerned me."

"It was just a great game of women's basketball and we're in the gold medal game now."

After an upset win over the USA in the quarter-final, the Emerging Opals took on the hosts who were in strong form following wins over Sweden, Hungary and Chile and a quarter final win over Canada.

Just as in the quarter final, the Emerging Opals got off to a slow start, allowing the hosts to stretch out to an 8-2 lead in the opening four minutes. Abigail Wehrung (University of Canberra) nailed a three and the nerves were settled.

Scherf shouldered much of the work in the opening period, with seven points and five rebounds to get the Uniroos on even terms at the break 16-16.

In the second half Garbin and Kristy Wallace (Baylor University) both found the basket and the Uniroos edged to a 28-25 lead, which stung the hosts into action, with six unanswered points to get back in front. At half-time the hosts led 38-34.

The third period opened with a Wehrung 3-pointer and the score see-sawed until a surge from the Unirooms extended the lead to seven with two minutes to go in the penultimate period. The home side lifted to close to gap to just one point - 54-53 at the final change.

The final ten minutes opened with another basket to Wehrung and every time the Unirooms gained an edge the home side would strike back until a Garbin three with a minute to go gave the Unirooms a buffer.

The Unirooms will be in search of their second basketball gold, and fifth medal overall at Summer Universiade in 2017. Australia won the women's basketball gold medal at the 2007 Games in Bangkok, where current head coach Chris Lucas was the assistant coach. The Unirooms have also captured bronze in 2009, 2001 and 2013.

The gold medal game is at Taipei Arena on Monday at 8pm local time/10pm Eastern.