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Medals and memories for the Uniroos in Taipei

With the Emerging Opals winning the basketball gold the Uniroos finish the 2017 Summer Universiade with nine medals – four gold, three silver and two bronze medals – and experiences to propel the 184-strong team to the next level in sport and in life.

The medal tally is the standard measuring device for any major championships event, but it's also the most superficial measuring stick.

The Uniroos have achieved many goals in Taipei, and you only need to listen to the experienced hands of the coaches and team leaders to know that unlike any other individual championships event, the World University Games provides developing student-athletes with the closest experience to an Olympic Games they can get.

So whilst the medals are nice, it's the memories, the experience and the opportunity to further develop their sporting careers that is more important.

That said, it is worth celebrating the medal performances of the Uniroos.

Sian Whittaker (Deakin University) was the star in the pool, claiming last-stroke wins in both the 100m and 200m backstroke events. Teammate and dual Commonwealth Games gold medallist Leiston Pickett (Griffith University) was just shaded in the final of the 50m breaststroke to claim silver. She will now set her sights on a rare achievement in Australian sport – winning three successive Commonwealth Games gold medals in that event next April on the Gold Coast.

The Emerging Opals, led superbly by captain Darcee Garbin (James Cook University) and head coach Chris Lucas, produced three stunning playoff matches to defeat the USA, Chinese Taipei and the Japan in the final to win their first Universiade gold medal for ten years. The young team, who came together just three weeks before the Games demonstrated all the team values of the Uniroos – they were proud, respectful, disciplined and united – they were also very good.

In athletics, Australian Catholic University classmates Kyle Cranston and Alysha Burnett both take home medals for show and tell. Cranston mastered the decathlon to take the gold medal and Burnett took the silver medal in the heptathlon.

Rio Olympian Brittany O'Brien (Western Sydney University) claimed a silver medal with US-Based Emily Meaney (Purdue University) in the 10m synchro platform and also just missed a medal in the individual 10m platform event and the mixed synchro platform with teammate Nicholas Jeffree (University of Technology Sydney).

Taryn Gollshewsky (Central Queensland University) spun her way through some atrocious wet weather conditions to claim the bronze medal in the women's discus and Taekwondo's Bailey Lewis (Victoria University) produced some spectacular fighting to snag the bronze in the -54kg category.

All the Uniroos medallists will now turn their attention to the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games.

For the likes of O'Brien, making the team shouldn't be the challenge. The athletics medallists Cranston, Burnett and Gollshewsky have the qualifying performance and are on track to make the team.

Whittaker in particular, and Pickett, she will be up against the full force of the senior Dolphins, which for Whittaker includes world 200m backstroke gold medallist Emily Seebolm, so they face a tougher task, but they have their eyes firmly on a spot in the team for the home games and the experience in Taipei will no doubt assist in achieving that goal.

And for the Emerging Opals, head coach Chris Lucas expects at least three members of the team to be pushing for senior Opal selection in the very near future, but as he said to the team after their gold medal win – "you should all be dreaming of being an Opal."

Whilst down on the overall medal tally from Gwangju two years ago the team also had ten fourth-place finishes and ended inside the top twenty nations, including 800m runner Georgia Griffiths (Monash University) who after crossing the line in fourth place was upgraded and presented with the bronze medal only to have the result reversed after a three-day appeal.

Water Polo captain Pascale Casey (Macquarie University) led the team into the Opening Ceremony and played superbly throughout the tournament to ear-mark herself as a future senior player for the Australian water polo team.

Australia competed in 16 of the 21 sports in Taipei and for those from athletics, badminton, basketball, diving, gymnastics, swimming, table tennis and weightlifting, the focus now turns squarely to the home Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast and longer term for the majority of sports who will feature at the Tokyo Olympic Games, their continued progression as young developing athletes to the Olympics Games.

For many, it's back to study, with more than one Uniroom mentioning that they may have gotten a little behind in their studies over the past month as they focused on the Games.

But that's the life of the student-athlete and for those with higher aspirations, given the scale and similarities between almost all aspects of the Universiade to a summer Olympic Games, Taipei has been a perfect learning experience for Australia's best student-athletes.