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Emerging Opals shine to take Uni Games Gold

The Emerging Opals have produced a masterclass for three quarters before getting the staggers to defeat Japan 85-78 to win the gold medal at the World University Games in Taipei.

After upset semi-final wins over the USA and hosts Chinese Taipei, the final looked likely to be a blow out with the Uniroos leading by 22 at three-quarter time.

In the end, a plucky Japan got the margin back to seven at the final buzzer. Whilst it was a lot closer than it looked in the final term, the Uniroos were never really in danger.

Led by the big guns, scoring and rebounding machines Darcee Garbin (James Cook University) with 30 points and 10 rebounds and Lauren Scherf (Victoria University), along with the speed and shooting skills of Baylor University's Kristy Wallace and Abi Wehrung (University of Canberra) the Emerging Opals put on a strong display, at least for the first three terms.

Leading by eight points at the first break and ten at the half from there it became a procession with Garbin, Scherf, Wilson and Wallace in the engine room, the Uniroos extended to 22 at the final break. Despite Japan scoring the opening 11 points of the final term to get the margin back to 14, the Uniroos steadied before the Rising Sun surged again.

The win is just the second time the Uniroos have captured women's basketball gold at the University Games, the last coming in Bangkok a decade ago.

Head coach Chris Lucas is in his fourth World University Games, the 12-woman squad has an average age of 21, in an Under 25 tournament.

How it unfolded:

Relying on scoring and rebounding machines Darcee Garbin (James Cook University) and Lauren Scherf (Victoria University) in the early stages, and they duly delivered, opened the scoring with Garbin nailing a basket, followed by a three to Garbin and Alex Wilson to get the Uniroos off to a 10-3 flyer.

Baylor University's Kristy Wallace and sharp shooter Abi Wehrung (University of Canberra) also joined the first quarter scoring.

Japan settled and traded baskets but the Uniroos pulled away and with Garbin bagging 9 points and 3 rebounds, Wehrung 5 points and Wallace 3 rebounds they were in command at the end of the first 10 minutes with a handy 24-16 lead.

Japan started quickly in the 2nd, dragging the gap back to 2 points, forcing coach Lucas to call an early time out. That seemed to work a charm, and with Wilson and Wehrung scoring and Scherf pulling rebounds, the margin was out to 14 – the biggest of the game half way through the period. Japan managed to snagged two baskets in the last twenty seconds, to get it back to 43-33 at half time.

From there it was somewhat of a procession for the Uniroos as the third period saw Garbin, Scherf, Wilson, Wehrung and Wallace all hitting the scoreboard and halfway through the term, the Uniroos all of a sudden led by 20 and ended the term with a 22 point break.

Japan scored the opening 11 points of the final term, and at one point got the margin back to seven points, which caused some beads of sweat on the bench... but they held on to win the gold medal.

It was their second basketball gold, and sixth medal overall at Summer Universiade. Australia won the women's basketball gold medal at the 2007 Games in Bangkok. The Uniroos have also captured bronze in 2005, 2009, 2011 and 2013.

Chinese Taipei defeated Russia 81-66 to win the bronze medal.

Uniroos Women's Basketball Team – Emerging Opals

Chelsea Brook (The University of South Australia)

Aimie Clydesdale (Monash University)

Keely Froling (University of Canberra)

Darcee Garbin (James Cook University)

Megan McKay (St Mary's College)

Vanessa Panousis (Virginia Tech College)

Lauren Scherf (Victoria University)

Alexandra Sharp (Wake Forest College)

Carly Turner (St Mary's College)

Kristy Wallace (Baylor University)

Abi Wehrung (University of Canberra)

Alexandra Wilson (TAFE NSW)