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Experienced hands guiding Emerging Opals into final

After two big upset wins, against the USA in the quarter-final and hosts Chinese Taipei in the semi-final, the Emerging Boomers will rely on two experienced hands to get them up for the gold medal game against an undefeated Japan on Monday night (8pm/10pm AEST).

Head coach Chris Lucas is now in his fourth World University Games campaign, while Olympic silver and bronze medallist and Opals legend Jenni Screen is the Team Leader here in Taipei. She knows what it's like to win and lose big finals, having been part of the Opals world title winning team in 2006, as well as a bronze medal winning Uniroos team in 2005.

Having also been part of an Opals Olympic campaign, coach Lucas from the outset has talked about the magnitude of the University Game - the village, the meal hall and the buses.

"It's the same as the Olympics, just with younger athletes," Lucas said. "We've embraced the experience."

"To be exposed to this level of competition at this age is a wonderful experience for them. You look at last night's games in front of 15,000 and it's something they can take with them for life."

Lucas is 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.

"To bring the group together and the way they've done that, their chemistry and the way they connect with each other has just been fantastic," Lucas said.

"All these girls have known each other for years but don't necessarily play with each other. Some have come through together in junior competitions. We lost a couple of players, one to injury (Tahlia Tupaea) and one to promotion to the Opals (Alanna Smith), but I'm so proud of the group and the way they've gone about their task."

"It's a very young group. It's an under-25 tournament but our team is Under 23 and the average age is 21."

After downing Chinese Taipei 78-74, the team starts from scratch against an impressive Japanese outfit that dispatched an undefeated Russia in the semi-finals 84-63. The Russians defeated Australia 63-58 in the pool game, so the form line says Japan are solid favourites – not that this has bothered the Uniroos in the previous two sudden-death encounters.

Particularly when you consider the most recent encounter two weeks ago in the pre-Games Four-Nations tournament in Japan, where the Emerging Boomers beat the same Japanese team 84-75.

Lucas says all that means little.

"It's not going to be easy, they're humming. But we've improved as well," Lucas said.

"They are very well organized, their junior programs are strong and they are leading into Tokyo. We played them in the tournament in Japan and beat them by a few points, but they are playing better than they were three weeks ago - they beat Russia by twenty and we lost to them by five."

The Uniroos will again need to rely on some heavy work from scoring and rebounding machines Darcee Garbin (James Cook University) and Lauren Scherf (Victoria University), as well as the court speed and inside work of Baylor University's Kristy Wallace and steady shooting of Abi Wehrung (University of Canberra).

The Uniroos will be in search of their second basketball gold, and sixth medal overall at Summer Universiade in 2017. 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.