



Spring Fling a success for Oakhurst

by Anthony Campeau
Of the Sierra Star

If you happened to be walking around Oakhurst this weekend, you may have noticed a large influx of very tall young girls.

It wasn't your imagination.

This past weekend, Oakhurst hosted the first Spring Fling Girls Basketball Tournament.

Thirty-two teams from around the state competed in five different age divisions, ranging from 11-and-under to 17-and-under. Yosemite fielded three teams in the 12-and-under, 13-and-under and 17-and-under divisions.

Event organizers Jeff Nichols and Rick Slayton said the event was a great success and look forward to the future of AAU tournament basketball in Oakhurst.

"We wanted their first experience in Oakhurst to be good; I think we accomplished that," says Slayton. "We want the teams to come back and play again."

The tournament brought in more than 300 girls and more than 1,000 additional people into Oakhurst, says Slayton.

"The impact to the community was tremendous," says Nichols. "It brought in a lot of business to town. Both Rick and myself want to give a special thanks to the sponsors and others who helped make this tournament such a success." Slayton and Nichols also wanted to give a special thanks to Gary Blate and Eric Peterson who helped bring the event together.

The format of the tournament had teams playing in the Yosemite High School upper and lower gyms and also at Oak Creek Intermediate. Games were played over three days with the 13-and-overs playing in a tournament-type bracket system and the 12-and-unders playing a round-robin style. Sunday's games were all championships. All games were very competitive with every game but one being decided by five points or less.

The evening's most exciting game was in the 17-and-under division as the Bay Area Magic defeated the Ventura Galaxy 53-52 on a last second lay-up.

In the 11-and-under division, the Ventura Galaxy defeated the Bakersfield Heat. Bakersfield claimed the 12-and-under division with a thrilling victory over the Yosemite Badgers in the championship game.

The Oakland Bruins took home first place in the 13-and-under division with Clovis East finishing in second. In the 16-and-under division, the Lady Patriots from Lake Elsinore knocked off the Bay Area Magic.

For the Badgers, Ashley Nichols was named team most valuable player in the 12-and-under division and Lauren Cano snagged MVP in the 13-and-under division. And in a classy move by head coach Mack Blate, he awarded the entire 17-and-under Badger team with the MVP for their stellar play in the tournament.

Even though the Badger girls only placed in one division, the future is very bright for AAU basketball in Oakhurst and for Yosemite High School.

"Most of these girls haven't played together before as a team. They will need time to develop as a team, and that will benefit the high school in a few years after the girls have some tournament play under their belts," said Nichols.

The Badgers are planning an entire schedule of tournaments that will carry them into the summer. The Yosemite Badgers will face off against some of the state's best when they travel to Fresno to take part in Hoop World Three this weekend.

Yosemite will send five teams, including seventh- and eighth-grade boys and girls team with a 16-and-under squad joining as well. Games will begin on Friday [April 12] and will continue until Sunday.

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