

The

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# SIERRA STAR



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## Badgers youth basketball continues to make strides



Submitted

Members of the Yosemite Badgers' youth basketball program delivered a strong showing in the Top Gun AU Invitational Basketball Tournament.

The Yosemite Badgers' youth basketball program is off to a solid start after another strong showing recently. The Badgers' sixth and eighth grade girls' travel basketball teams trekked to Lemoore to compete in the Top Gun AAU Invitational Basketball Tournament. Held at Lemoore Naval Air Station and Woodrow Wilson Middle School, Hanford, the two-day tournament was participated in by more than 48 youth basketball teams from around the greater San Joaquin Valley.

Earlier last month, the Badgers 11-and-under team won its first championship game of the season in the Yosemite Spring Fling Tournament in Oakhurst.

The lady Badgers then traveled to Merced a few weeks ago to compete in the Merced All-Stars Tournament hosted at Merced College. After breezing through the competition, the Badgers again advanced to the championship round and easily defeated their rival by more than 20 points, as they earned their second championship title of the season.

Before traveling to Lemoore, the Badgers' coach, Mac Blate, wanted to challenge his young 11-and-under team by entering them in the 12-and-under age bracket.

Blate said: "I knew we would have some tough competition, but I wanted to see how our girls would respond when faced with tougher opponents."

Respond they did. The Badgers won their first game against the Porterville Blast. The Badgers were down by 6 points at the start of the second half, as Porterville applied full-court pressure and forced the Badgers to make some difficult shots.

Yosemite forwards Amber Bushman and Vanessa Mudrick led the Badgers on an impressive 16-0 run late in the game to recapture the lead.

With great defensive help from teammates Lacey Smith, Devin Grant, Sydnee Fipps, Joanna Barney, Amanda Rudd and Brandi Bushman, the Badgers went on to win the game, 37-34. After the contest, Blate said, "this was by far our best game of the year."

The Badgers' spirits were then challenged as they battled the Bakersfield Heat in game two. However, the Heat's pressure defense, led by their 6-foot-1-inch center proved to be too much for the Badgers and resulted in the Badgers' first loss of the year.

Undeterred, the Badgers rebounded with an impressive victory over the Clovis West Eagles on Sunday, to capture a respectable third place finish in the 12-and-under age division. Badgers' MVP honors went to Mudrick.

### Consolation champion

The Badgers' 13U team was named consolation champion.

The eighth grade team competed in the 13-and-under division and also had a great showing.

With an 8 a.m. game on Saturday, the Badgers proved they were ready to play, as the Badgers' defense stalled the Madera Wildcats' inside game.

The Badgers' stand-out guard, Jenay Herring, could not be stopped inside, while teammates Cassandra Slayton, Courtney Nichols, Marissa Schaal and Nakayla Noonkester rounded out the rest of the Badger scoring leaders.

Defensive honors went to Deena Brosi, Rebecca Schaal, Crystal Potter, Ashlee Bullard, Krista Kenyon and Kristina Beck, as the Badgers defeated Madera, 38-26.

### Excitement begins

However, the Badgers played their most exciting game of the tournament at 6:15 p.m. on Saturday against the Fresno Vines. Nichols made a clutch 3-point basket at the buzzer to send the game into overtime. Then, with seconds ticking down, Herring scored the Badgers' winning basket, to secure a spot for the Badgers in the semi-finals on Sunday.

The Hanford Elite proved to be too tough, as the Badgers lost during the first round of the playoffs. After regrouping, the Badgers made a better showing against the Merced All-Stars during the second-round playoffs at 3:45 p.m.

They finished the tournament with fourth-place honors in a very competitive division.

Club President Rick Slayton complimented the Badger coaches and parents for their support and said, "I'm very proud of

our girls and especially proud of the great coaching that Mac Blate, Aaron Nichols and Dustin Westfall have provided.

“They gladly volunteer their time and efforts to help our young student-athletes to develop the skills and discipline they will need to be competitive at the high school level. And from what I’ve seen, the future looks very bright.”

The Yosemite Youth Basketball Association is celebrating its fifth year and sponsors five AAU girls’ travel teams, age 10 through high school. The program continues to grow.

Additionally, the organization plans to hold a boys’ tournament in Oakhurst later this year. There are sponsorship opportunities.

Information: Yosemite Youth Basketball Association Club President Rick Slayton, (559) 683-5105, or Assistant Club Director Jeff Nichols, (559) 259-7366.

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