

Local youth basketball team upsets the odds at Eureka tournament

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The future of girls basketball in Del Norte County appears to be in good hands.

Earlier this month, four youth teams from the county traveled to Eureka to compete at The Athlete Factory end of season tournament in Eureka, including a group of 7-9 year olds who upset the odds to win their championship.

And they did it with some clutch defense, winning three straight games, all in one day.

“We were pretty much underdogs in the tournament,” head coach Andrew Salas said. “We had to play three games in one day to go all the way and it was tough. The girls were tired and beat and they just pushed through.”

According to Salas, the Del Norte teams made the decision to compete this season in Eureka after the local youth recreation league was canceled this year, and there were enough girls to field four different teams — two at the 7-9 age group and two in the 10-12 age group — all of which made the trip south several times over the past two months just to compete.

In addition to the 7-9 White Team's championship victory, the Del Norte 7-9 Yellow Team placed third in their tournament and one of the two 10-12 teams made it to their tournament championship.

And that points to a bright future for girls basketball in the county.

"I do think so," Salas said. "These girls are up and coming, and they're something to be watching for."

The 7-9 White team won their championship in large part thanks to some clutch defense, with the team overcoming a halftime deficit to win the championship game 25-14 and allowing just four second-half points.

"Our defense is what won it for us," the coach said. "We shut them down defensively in the second half."

And the girls were naturally delighted with the outcome.

"They were stoked," Salas said. "This was their first championship. Most of them are third graders."

As for what impressed the coach most about his team's performance?

"Their heart," he said without hesitation. "Their heart at the end was amazing."

The pandemic obviously limited the opportunities for teams to compete over the past couple of years, but this group of young girls has had the opportunity to practice together and they have developed a good team chemistry in that time.

"They've been playing together for a little bit and they really are a tight-knit group," the coach said. "They're really good friends and love playing basketball together."

They also have worked hard on their way to a championship, overcoming the odds and the tag of underdogs.

"They all exceeded expectations for sure," Salas said. "And they all worked hard for it."

Salas expects the Del Norte youth recreation league to return next year, but says he'd be happy to compete again in Eureka as well, if that's what his girls want to do.

The championship team included Quinn Salas, Qira Salas, Brynn McMillan, Kalea Williams, Hayden O'Brien, Allie Smith, Kia Lopez and Triston Smith.