

The Eastern Districts Junior Basketball Association (EDJBA) has a long and decorated history of being the nursery; the starting point for so many of today's professional basketball players.

Often the Eltham and Bulleen clubs are highlighted as the starting point of a player development, whilst the original club can be forgotten. However Rebecca Pizzey joined her local club, the 120 team domestic focussed Balwyn Blazers basketball club. Playing home games out of Balwyn High School and Balwyn Leisure Centre, this was the beginning for a player who at the age of 20 has already accrued an impressive resume which includes WNBL, scholarship at the Australian Institute of Sport and featuring on Australian junior teams.

After showing early talent at the U8 and U9 level, Rebecca made a move across to fellow EDJBA club and Junior Championship program Bulleen. In doing so, she undertook a highly successful junior career, winning 2 Victorian Championship titles and 3 National Junior Classic titles for Bulleen.

It is easy to assume that with such glittering achievements that everything comes easy. She ended up at the AIS, surely she had an easy path? However, Rebecca is just another example of setbacks and rejection going onto fuel the passion to aspire for more. Rebecca was disappointed at non-selection for the Vic Metro U16 team as a top age player in 2014. But in such times, sometimes you see young players walkaway, whilst others stand up and use it as inspiration.

Rebecca's work was rewarded less than a year later as she was selected as a bottom age U18 for the Vic Metro U18 team in 2015. It was here where national selectors started to pay some attention for the young talent from Balwyn. The team went onto win the national championship by 40 in the final over South Australia Country. The 2020 Eltham NBL1 combination of Anneli Maley and Rebecca Pizzey led the charge for Victoria Metro with 36 points and 33 rebounds between them! For Rebecca, the week presented her chance to perform and show her ability; she took it both hands. This was the first of three national championships, that Rebecca would collect.

It was from here when the opportunities were created. Following this performance Rebecca was at an Australian Camp, from which she was selected for the Australian U16 team in late 2015 to win the Oceania Championship to qualify Australia for the 2016 U17 World Championships in Spain.

From not making a Vic Metro team in 2014, to making the equivalent aged Australian team in 2016, Rebecca was off to Spain in pursuit of the world championship, an event that had only ever been won by the United States. Rebecca reflects on that period of improvement and recognises Gary Fox has a great influence. "He made a big impact on me as a junior, showed me how hard I had to work in order to be the player I wanted to be."

From the outset the Australians showed their intentions, destroying Mexico in the opening game 98-38, followed by a comfortable victory over China and then a 7 point win over France to progress through the pool stage. Arguably however, the best two teams were on

the same side of the finals draw, with Australia and the USA destined for a Semi Final matchup.

After comfortably bypassing the Czech Republic by 30, the Australians faced the United States, a nation who'd never lost at U17 World Championship level.

Not only did Australia defeat the USA, they did so by 13 points and had navigated their way to the Gold Medal game against Italy. All too often you see a team fall after a significant victory, but not the 2016 U17 Women who went on to win the world title defeating Italy 62-38.

Whilst it was an incredible achievement for the Australian team, for Rebecca throughout the event she had a constantly sub-luxing shoulder. Immediately after the event, she returned home for surgery and was away from the courts for 6 months recovering. During this period she also suffered a stress fracture in her shin. Secretly her parents were pleased.... Allowed for more Year 12 study!

Through that 2016 and 2017 period, Pizzey called the Australian Institute of Sport home. Playing in the (then) SEABL for the Centre of Excellence was a strong introduction to playing against established WNBL players. In 2017, Australia had qualified for the U19 World Championships in Italy and Rebecca was once again getting the chance to play against the best in the world.

The Australians took a loss in game 1 to Japan, but recovered quickly to the playoffs. A heartbreaking 2 point loss to eventual World Championship winners Russia, would see the Australians finishing 6th in the end.

That event was also around the time of Rebecca's return home to Melbourne and the beginning of her professional career. Now in her third year with the Dandenong/Southside WNBL program, she is establishing her senior career. But it is at NBL1 and previously SEABL where Pizzey is really developing her game, adjusting to the elite level. After a strong year at Dandenong in 2018, she moved to play a key role with the Nunawading team for 2019. Eltham would like to make her a staple within the NBL1 program for the years to come and the place for her return for WNBL off-seasons.

Those domestic coaches back in her days at Balwyn Blazers, provided the passion for the game that allowed a young Rebecca Pizzey to develop into a world champion. It is now the time for Eltham to assist Rebecca on her pathway in the senior levels.

After overcoming her own setbacks along the way, Rebecca has come out the other side more determined to achieve.