

# New academy needs support

THE creation of a South West Academy of Sport became official last week with the presentation of \$100,000 funding from the State Government by South West Minister Mark McGowan.

The presentation was on top of \$45,000 previously committed by the Government to establish the academy, which will boost sporting development through the region, by providing high level support and training locally.

The academy will also help reduce the stress on families of up-and-coming champions presently forced to travel to the metropolitan area to improve themselves.

But SWAS board chairman Don Punch said there was still a long way to go to turn the initiative into a reality, with sponsorship from businesses needed to help fund the academy.

"State Government funding commitments will cover administration costs, but the develop-

ment of sports programs for young athletes depends on support from the community and business sectors," he said.

"The SWAS model is similar to how the WA Institute of Sport and the Australian Institute of Sport operate.

"It provides the opportunity for business to be associated with youth, fitness, sport and promotion of healthy lifestyles in children."

Mr Punch said the it was estimated up to \$400,000 would be needed in sponsorship.

He said the new academy would work with an initial three sports and create scholarship programs to support athletes of sports not initially taken on.

Sports programs operated by SWAS would go out into the region dependent on appropriate sporting facilities, with a Bunbury-based administration centre.

Selection of sports taken on by the academy will be through an open expression-of-interest

process expected to commence shortly.

"A key component for selection of sports will be looking at the existing talent development pathway and the role SWAS would be expected to fulfil," Mr Punch said.

"The academy will be a stepping stone to assist athletes going from the region to WAIS, AIS and other higher level competition."

Mr Punch said the academy, would not be Bunbury-centric but travel throughout the region.

"A big challenge for talented local athletes is that they often have to travel to the metropolitan area to access the best training," he said.

"The academy will have an administration base in Bunbury but sports programs will be conducted around the region where there are appropriate facilities."

Mr Punch said the academy would not just benefit an elite few throughout the region, but enhance sport at all levels.