

Sport academy becomes reality

STEVE TUOHEY

THE quest to develop the next batch of Australian sports stars right here in the South West began when the South West Academy of Sport made its debut last week.

The regional academy will be a first for WA after more than 12 months of planning by the South West Development Commission, South West Chambers of Commerce and Industries and local proponent Rolf Stene.

The late Wally Foreman, who was the founding director of the WA Institute of Sport, was also involved in developing the South West academy concept, which will be run in partnership with WAIS in Perth and offer local athletes the opportunity to enter a top-level program without leaving the region.

The academy, which is due to begin operating in summer next year, will initially focus on three to four sports and also offer scholarships to individual athletes, catering for about 100 budding stars.

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South West Minister Mark McGowan introduced the concept to stakeholders and potential sponsors at Bunbury's Sanctuary Golf Resort last Friday, with the aim of generating financial support and making the program an ongoing success.

Academy chairman and South West Development Commission chief executive Don Punch said Mr Foreman's involvement in preparing the academy plan had been invaluable and one of his strongest messages was to encourage local involvement.

“That was a big message Wally gave us – get as much community

support and ownership of the academy as possible so it is truly a reflection of the local people,” Mr Punch said.

“We have received very good feedback after preliminary meetings with local business people and Rotary clubs and the feeling is very positive at the moment.”

Mr Punch said the aim of the program was to minimise the impact for athletes participating in development programs by providing the coaching and equipment necessary to eliminate the need to travel or relocate to bigger cities.

“Some parents are taking their kids to Perth twice a week while other kids are dropping out altogether. There are a lot of young people that have the potential but can't realise that potential,” he said.

A selection process has been put in place to identify the sports that will be part of the first academy intake. Each sport will then receive development in the areas of strength, technical skills and personal life skills in a holistic development approach.