

Rising stars to reap the rewards of SW academy

By STEVE TUOHEY

A NEW era for South West athletes has commenced following the official launch of the South West Academy of Sport on Friday night.

The academy's inaugural partner sports were announced by Olympian Peter Watson during a gala function at the Sanctuary Golf Resort, with football, soccer, basketball and hockey named as the first four sports to receive a guernsey.

Representatives from each sport said they were delighted to be included among SWAS's inaugural intake, which will be the first program of its kind in regional WA.

South West Minister Mark McGowan, who announced a further \$100,000 funding for the program, voiced his support for the concept and said he was hopeful it would be rolled out to other regional areas.

"I think the South West is the right place to start and I also think the academy program is something we will see more of in regional areas," Mr McGowan said.

"Traditionally, young people pursuing a career in sport would have been forced to spend an enormous amount of time travelling between Perth and their home town, placing considerable strain on families.

"The academy will provide talented athletes in four sports with the training they require to follow their dreams of competing at the next



Olympians Joe Haydar (weightlifting 1964) and Valerie Melville (athletics 1956) show their support for the South West Academy of Sport on Friday night. PICTURE: HENRY LAM

level without leaving their homes."

Special guests and academy stakeholders also attended Friday's launch, which included an interview with former Olympic weightlifter Joe Haydar.

Home-grown basketball star Mark

Worthington, who was unable to attend the launch due to his Beijing Olympics training schedule, was named patron of the academy's basketball program.

Funding for the program has also come from foundation partner The

Griffin Group and associate sponsors Woesley Alumina and WIN Television.

The South Western Times is also sponsoring the academy and will feature regular updates of the academy's progress.