

Rising basketball stars enjoy successful US trip

ON the evening of December 25, 2010 while your average Australian family was preparing to sleep off their Christmas lunch, 20 up-and-coming basketball athletes from the South West Academy of Sport and their families were making yet another sacrifice — driving to the airport.

Departing at 11pm on Christmas night was a tour of emerging Basketball South West athletes, travelling to the United States as part of a reward for the effort they have put in while being

involved in the organisation's demanding development program.

The group, made up of boys and girls from around the region, played 10 games over the course of the 23-day trip that included fixtures against high school teams in South and North Carolina, Virginia and New York.

"To be involved in our elite program, we demand quite a lot of them," tour leader Steve Hawkins said.

"For these groups, if they had SWAS scholarships, they weren't allowed to play any other sport.

"That was a rule we had with the thought that if they concentrated only on the one sport then they would improve very much."

Both male and female side's enjoyed strong results with the girls winning nine of their 10 games, while the boys played out five wins and five losses.

"This is the first time we've done it," Hawkins said.

"I was involved in a tour back in December 2007 where I coached some guys from Tasmania who toured Queensland and WA.

"I came back from that, and thought that it would be good to reward our players and do this.

"It went from there and now we'll look to take a group every two or three years."

The members of the group, aged 17 or 18, were billeted with local families for much of their stay, something that Hawkins said many found to be a highlight of the trip.

"They actually went into American homes and probably saw that they are not that much different than us," he said.

"But it was interesting for them to see that slightly different culture and how they did things."