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JOYCE PRAISES WABL

Wollongong Hawks coach Brendan Joyce has trumpeted the Waratah Australian Basketball League as an ideal development nursery for future NBL players. Joyce had little involvement with the WABL before guiding a young and undersized Illawarra Seahawks to sixth spot this season.

Hawks forward John Philip has blossomed with the Seahawks. He captured the past two league MVP crowns and has put together another spectacular season to be the hot favourite for his third award. Joyce's son Daniel joined the team this season and has progressed at a rapid rate. A clever playmaker with a good shooting eye, Joyce junior is about to start his rookie NBL season with the Hawks and his father couldn't be happier with his development. Seahawks centre Keiran Gleeson is expected to gain the 10th and final spot on the Wollongong roster, while Joyce has high hopes for a bevy of other promising Illawarra juniors who have gained valuable experience with the Seahawks.

"The Waratah league has a lot of benefits for our players who have graduated from the Illawarra junior program and the other kids who are coming through," Joyce snr said.

"It provides a great opportunity for young players to show how serious they are about making a career out of basketball because it's an ideal stepping stone to the NBL. We want the focus at the Seahawks to be on bringing kids into the team and developing them for the Hawks. They play against grown men and they learn the systems and structures we use with the Hawks."

Philip leads the league in scoring with more than 30 points per game, while 18-year-old Joyce has exceeded his father's expectations with 19 points and more than seven assists per outing. He believes he has found a capable replacement for former guard Adam Caporn as Cortez Groves' understudy.

"He'll have his ups and downs being his first season, but I expect him to go fairly well," Joyce said.

"People are fairly judgemental of the coach's son. I already heard it at the start of the season with the Seahawks and it'll probably happen at the Hawks, but I can only judge him by what he does. He's come off a great under 20 national championship to finish his junior career, he's leading the

Waratah league in assists. You could argue he's the best guard in the league at 18 with the stats he's put up.

"He's played well and developed really well and his next challenge is to perform well in the NBL. He's excited about it and he's nervous about it, but if you look around the country there are a limited number of home-grown point guards and I think we've got one. He's going to be a pretty good player."

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