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\$5000 BOOST FOR SUDANESE BASKETBALL COMP IN PENRITH

The Sudanese-Australian Interstate Basketball Tournament has received a major boost on the eve of the competition, with the Department of Justice & Attorney General providing a \$5000 grant.

“The tournament gives young people, some who are relatively new to Australia, a chance to showcase their talents and forge positive new friendships in an atmosphere of social inclusion,” said the Department’s Sudanese Community Liaison Officer Adol Takpiny.

Twenty-four teams, including two female outfits, from around Australia will compete in the tournament at Penrith Valley Regional Sports Centre on Saturday and Sunday. While most of the players are of Sudanese heritage, the tournament will also feature young people from Liberian, Sierra Leone, Ethiopian and Chinese backgrounds.

Tournament organiser Mayor Chagai said for some players, the tournament could be a stepping-stone to bigger things.

“The talent emerging from the Sudanese-Australian community is quite extraordinary – most of the players on show this weekend are tall, athletic and capable of slam dunks,” Mr Chagai said.

“Many will be trying to emulate the success of Australian Boomers star Ater Majok, who competed in this tournament in 2006”.

Majok, 21, developed his skills in Blacktown before becoming the first basketball player of Sudanese heritage to represent Australia.

The Star Basketball Recreation Club in Blacktown, run by volunteer Sudanese basketball players, facilitates the annual tournament which is now in its seventh year. The club provides young people, especially those ‘at risk’, with access to free basketball training and other services to assist their health and wellbeing.

The Department of Justice & Attorney General is working closely with the Sudanese community on diversionary programs to prevent crime and on legal education initiatives.

“The law and culture in Sudan is significantly different and it is vital that Sudanese people are given support and encouragement as they adjust to life in Australia,” Ms Takpiny said.

“The Department is pleased to have the opportunity to support the young people who have organised this basketball tournament. Their teamwork and leadership are resulting in positive, practical outcomes.”

The Department of Justice & Attorney General appointed Ms Takpiny as its Sudanese Community Liaison Officer in August 2008.