

THE BIG READ

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**AGRON
LATIFI**

A Hawk in the desert

Spreading gospel to Territory 'heartland'

AS A long-time supporter of the Illawarra Hawks, Kaleena Webbe can see why the club is so loved by its loyal fans.

But she never expected to find such a "mad keen" supporter of the Hawks some 3000 kilometres north west of Wollongong.

That is exactly what Webbe ran into recently while volunteering for the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA) in the remote Aboriginal community of Laramba in the Northern Territory.

"I was shocked," she told the Mercury. "I had to do a double-take to make sure he was actually wearing a Hawks jersey."

"To my surprise it was a Hawks jersey. After talking to him (Kathan Stafford, 17) I found out he and his younger brother (Reagan) had been to Wollongong many years ago and watched a Hawks game against Sydney Kings."

"Reagan actually goes for the Kings. It was funny seeing the brothers argue about which NBL team is the best."

"It just goes to show the Hawks v Kings rivalry is strong everywhere, even in a remote Aboriginal community 3000km away."

Webbe herself has a long affiliation with the Illawarra Hawks.

The Wollongong-born-and-bred woman was once upon a time head cheerleader for the Hawks back in the days when the likes of Gordie McLeod, 'Stormin' Norman Taylor and Chuck Harmison ruled the roost at the Snakepit.

These and many other Hawks players in the 1980s and 90s often frequented Wollongong gyms run by Kaleena's father Lincoln Webbe.

"I love this club," Webbe said.

"Ever since I can remember my family was involved with the Hawks in one way or another. I remember all the players back then coming to dad's gyms. He would help with their strength-and-conditioning work. I was even a head cheerleader for a short period of time."

"I remember our family always used to come to the Snakepit to watch the Hawks play. They were great times. The club was all about community back then and the pleasing thing is the Hawks are still all about community."

"They do so much for the community. I knew they would be happy to help me when I asked them to send jerseys to Kathan and the other Indigenous boys in Laramba."

"The boys love basketball and sports in general."

"I'm so happy I can help these kids through my volunteering work with NASCA. The organisation provides holistic support to young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, supporting them on their educational pathway to a self-determined future."

The Illawarra Hawks are well known for their work supporting and promoting basketball in Indigenous communities.

Former Hawk Tyson Demos actually played a big part in the NBL introducing an Indigenous round to its schedule of games.

Demos and Australian Boomers skipper Patty Mills have been instrumental in ensuring an Indigenous round of fixtures is included every season.

Mills, who plays for the New Jersey Nets in the NBA, continues to promote the game to remote Aboriginal communities.

Illawarra Hawks player Tim Coenraad said the club was more than happy to send jerseys to the young Indigenous kids in Laramba.

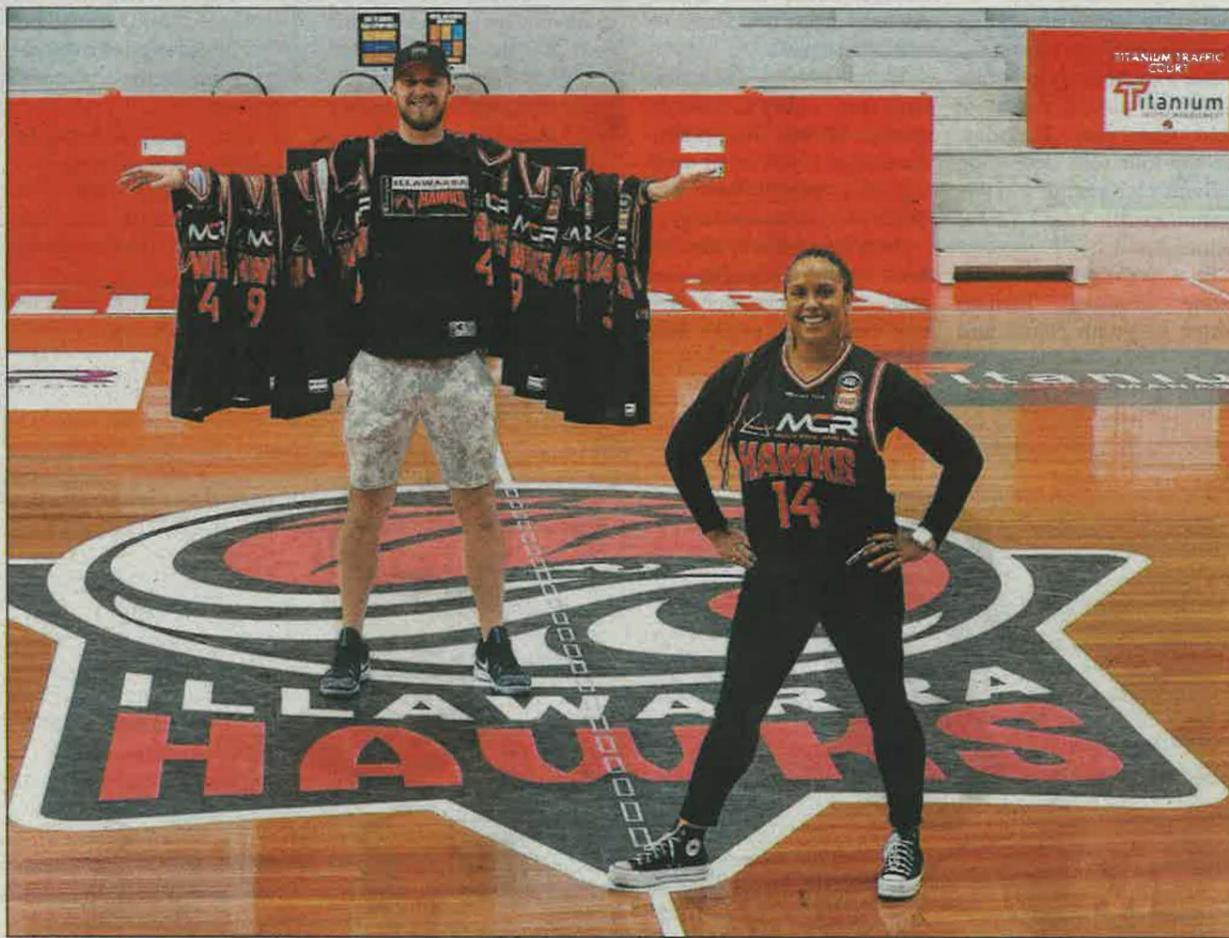
"That is the least we can do to be honest," Coenraad told the Mercury.

"I mean, I love stories like this. You see the reach that you have. It's great, especially in such a remote area."

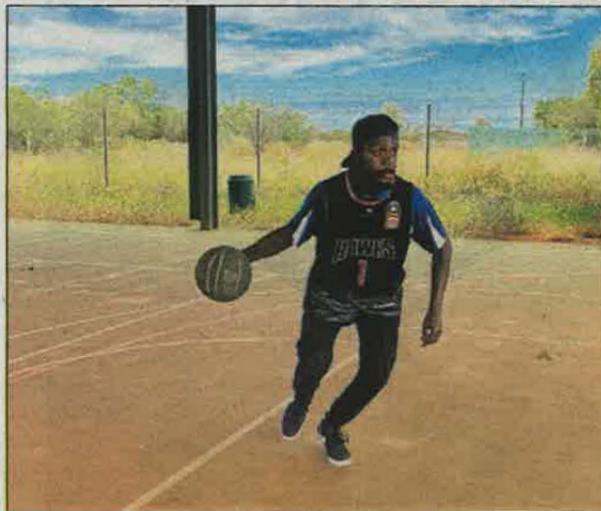
"Whenever something like that comes up, you know, it's always good to take advantage of and let him know that 'hey we appreciate the Hawks family even though they're over 3000km away'."

"This is just a small token of appreciation for those guys. It's something small we can do but hopefully it means a lot to them."

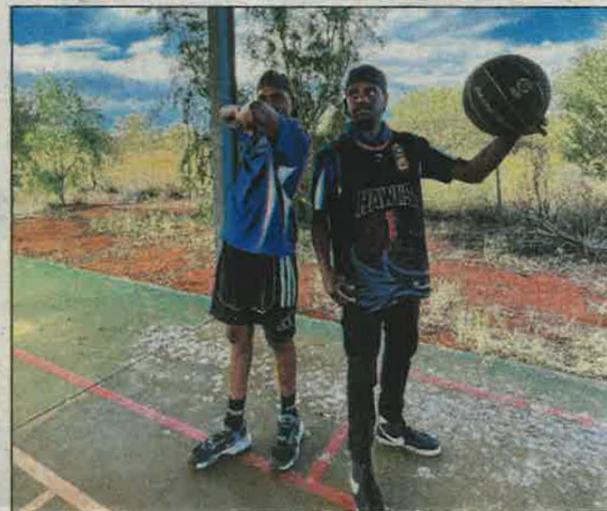
"This year hopefully with



HANDS OUT: Illawarra Hawks player Tim Coenraad with Kaleena Webbe. The Hawks have donated jerseys to a group of indigenous kids in the remote community of Laramba. **Picture: Robert Peet**



SHARR SHOOTER: Kathan Stafford loves playing basketball and is a big fan of the Illawarra Hawks. **Picture: Supplied**



BROTHERS AND RIVALS: Reagan and Kathan Stafford support the Sydney Kings and Illawarra Hawks respectively. **Picture: Supplied.**

COVID in the background, we're really trying to get more community-focused than we ever have before. We want to really get out to schools and make a difference and get kids excited about the Hawks again."

Coenraad said it was really important the club followed the good work of former players such as Demos by promoting the game and the Hawks in Indigenous communities.

"Look, Tyson has really been the ambassador when it comes to the Indigenous space and the amount of great work that he's done speaks for itself," he said.

"We're trying to follow bis

lead in terms of bringing on groups in the Indigenous community."

"We've been working closely with an organisation called The Clontarf Foundation, which exists to improve the education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, and by doing so equips them to participate more meaningfully in society."

"That's a space we definitely want to make sure we're servicing as well because there are Indigenous communities within the Illawarra and even those ones outside that are asking

for help. It's hard to help everyone but if we can take care of our local community and even those little bits and pieces that pop up that are outside the community, it makes a difference."

"At the end of the day we want to put a smile on someone's face. Something like this is an easy token of appreciation for us to just pitch in but we're excited about getting back into the community and making sure that we are making previous players like Tyson, Glen Saville and Mat Campbell proud to be a former Hawk."

"We want to make sure that we're in the community and the kids see our faces."

"Professional athletes have a unique ability to change a young boy or girl's life by the words they say. Kids hold athletes in high regard. We have a responsibility to be positive role models. I remember when I was in school in Brisbane and I met Wendell Sailor, who was playing for the Broncos. I still remember him just patting me on the shoulder and saying 'you'll be all right mate, just keep working hard'. That phrase has just stuck in my head forever, and it was a really positive experience for me."

"It's important we give kids similarly positive experiences."