



## Top stories

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### Basketball tour brings Australia to Alvin

By BRANDON C. WILLIAMS  
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ALVIN — Tom Williams didn't know what to expect when he arrived at Alvin High School on Tuesday afternoon. He had his own impressions, but within minutes, the young visitor watched his beliefs melt away in front of his eyes.

"I love it," said Williams, a member of the visiting Brighton Wolves, an Australian national junior basketball team that concluded its three-week tour of Texas with a pair of games against the Yellowjackets on Tuesday night. "It's certainly different than what I expected. I had this impression that American students were just laid-back, but I saw they don't muck around in the classroom."

The Wolves, based out of Melbourne, are the first Australian Under-17 team to play in Texas. Prior to visiting Alvin, the team played games in Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin and San Antonio.

Basketball is a popular sport among youths in the Land Down Under. In Melbourne, up to 60,000 youngsters are on the hardwood or asphalt during the weekend. "The sport is growing all the time," said tour leader Denton Brown. "It's impossible to get a free court there." The styles of play are different. Whereas American players playing fast-paced and above-the-rim, the Wolves — like most Australian teams — are deeply engrained into executing a fundamental, half-court style that rarely includes flights of fancy to the rim.

"We're taught to be more physical," said guard Will McTaggart. "There's a lot less fouling in Australia. Sometimes, you can get tossed around and they don't call it. Here, if you touch someone, there's going to be a whistle blown."

"I'm loving the style of play here," added forward Nick Vallianos, who has modeled his game around Miami Heat All-Star center Shaquille O'Neal. "It's much more competitive than we expected. That's fine, because the best part of it is that it has really helped improve my skills." Like the Wolves, the Yellowjackets players were excited about the opportunity to take on a team that resides a whopping 9,038 miles from Alvin.

"I think this helps us get a chance to build team chemistry, gain confidence and see a different style of play," said Yellowjackets senior forward Stephen Owens.

The Wolves arrived in Texas on Dec. 27 and will leave on Friday, heading back to Los Angeles where they will conclude their trip with a series of games along with a tour of Disneyland and Hollywood. Despite the 24-hour flight to Dallas (where they played their first game of the tour three hours later) and adapting to the climate, there have been few glitches in their trip.

The stint in Dallas was highlighted by a visit to Dealey Plaza, the site where President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. It was there where the Wolves began soaking in more than just lessons on the basketball court.

"To see their interest in it was very pleasing," said Brown. "It was a moving cultural experience."

The experience reached new highs on Tuesday, where the players, coaches and entourage were treated to Texas-style barbeque at Joe's BBQ. Prior to that, the Wolves spent the afternoon attending classes at Alvin High School, where the student council gave their guests a Lone Star State-sized welcome.

"The cultural aspect was unbelievable," said Alvin head coach Eric Aaron. "It was wonderful to expose the kids to something they've never experienced. How many kids can be able to say that they were not only able to play against Australian basketball players, but also have the chance to interact with them for a few hours as well."

It didn't take long before both host and visitor were able to break through the cultural barriers. Nowhere was that apparent that at the pregame luncheon, where the tables were filled with banter about common teenage issues along with the exchange of MySpace.com addresses.

"I thought they would be completely different from us," said senior Michelle Hoover, a member of the Australian Appreciation Day committee. "In the end, they're pretty much like us."

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