

Aussies back in town for hoops

*Lee players
looking forward
to experience*

By Chris Lassiter
Sports Writer

STAUNTON — Lauren Henderson feels sort of like an Olympian.

The senior forward for Robert E. Lee girls' basketball team will enjoy the international competition when the Lee Ladies face the visiting Australian team tonight in the Paul Hatcher gym.

"I like getting to hang out with them, because they're really interesting," said Henderson, one of the team comediennes, who periodically e-mails the Australian players she met last year. "And playing them is fun, because I'll never get another chance to play a team from another country."

Last year marked the inaugural matchup between the Lee Ladies and the HSE Australia Possums. The strong, fast, tough Australian team walked out with a 55-49 win and a bunch of new friends.

This is the fourth year that the Aussies will bring a boys' basketball squad to the states.

"It creates a lot of interest," Lee's famed boys' basketball coach Paul Hatcher said. "It's a good, nondistrict game during the holidays."

The inaugural matchup between the Australians and Leemen saw former Lee star Tyler Crawford grab his 1,000th career rebound in an 89-27 rout. The next year, Lee barely got past Australia's junior national team, the Melbourne Tigers. The Leemen held on for a hard-fought 56-50 win.

Lee scored 25 of the game's first 27 points last season in a lopsided contest over the Australia HSE Wombats. This year, Hatcher's not sure what to expect.

"It's hard to find out anything," said Hatcher, who likes international competition.

If You Go

Tonight's Girls' Game

■ Melbourne, Australia
at Lee High, JV game
6 p.m., Varsity game 7:30
p.m.

Friday's Boys' Game

■ Melbourne, Australia
at Lee High, JV game
6 p.m., Varsity game 7:30
p.m.

**“I like getting
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Lauren Henderson

Robert E. Lee senior

With no scouting reports available, Hatcher and girls' coach Jeremy Hartman will have to make adjustments on the fly.

"At the same time, we don't know what they're going to do," Hartman said. "It's a good test of how we adjust to certain things. It test our kids mentally."

Hartman, a second-year coach, enjoys the universal aspect of sports.

"You have X amount of people coming together to accomplish one goal," Hartman said. "That kinda transcends all cultures."

The contests are more than basketball competition. The squads share pizza afterward. Two national anthems are played, and the teams exchange gifts before the game.

Hatcher once got a gift book with pictures of Australian scenery and landmarks.

"The pictures were beautiful," Hatcher said. "It's a beautiful country."

Senior Keon Scott, the Leemen's sharp-shooting point guard, might consider lobbying Hatcher for an away game in the land Down Under.

"That would be fun," said Scott, who enjoys the international competition. "I wish we could do that. That would be the trip of a lifetime."