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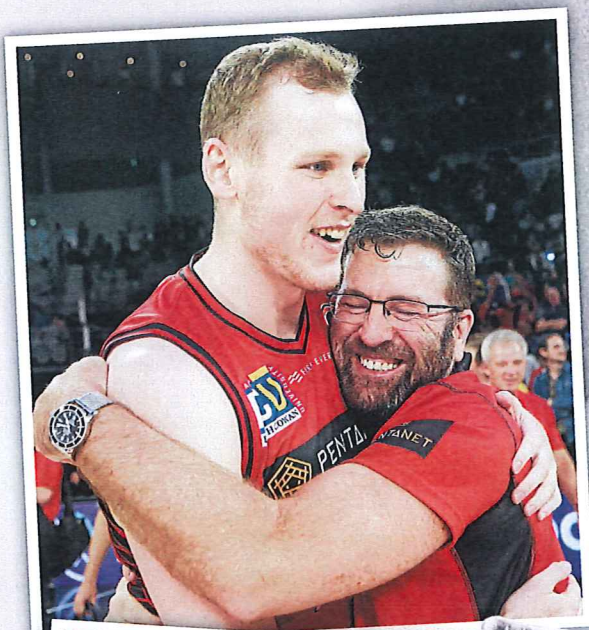
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## STILL THE BOY CALLED 'BUDSA'

One of the country's most successful basketball coaches has never forgotten his Warrnambool roots.

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# COVER STORY

weekender.

## STILL THE BOY 'BUDSA'

ONE of the country's most successful basketball coaches has never forgotten his Warrnambool roots, writes JUSTINE McCULLAGH-BEASY.

**T**REVOR Gleeson is transported back to Warrnambool every time he hears the nickname 'Budsa'.

His brother coined it long before he became one of Australia's best basketball coaches. And it stuck.

Now when Trevor hears it yelled from the crowd during an NBL game he knows it belongs to someone from the 'Bool.

"That was a long time ago when I was about three or four," he says of his nickname's origins. "I went into Mum and said 'I've got no budsa to play with'.

"My brother started coaching me and started calling me that, more of a dig than anything, instead of buddy or friend.

"It just stuck with me from four or five years old. It's only people from Warrnambool who call me that and probably closer friends."

It is one of the intricate details which tie the four-time Perth Wildcats championship-winning coach to his home town on Victoria's Shipwreck Coast.

Each time the Warrnambool Mermaids take to the floor, they do so with a piece of the Gleeson clan. Trevor's late mother Margaret, known affectionately as Mag, picked the moniker when he started coaching them in the late 1980s.

It was Trevor's first foray into season-long coaching and came after a serious back injury sustained at work ended his own playing career when he was still in his teens.

The Mermaids were created and played in then-Country Victorian Invitational Basketball League, along with their male equivalent the Seahawks.

"There wasn't a girls team and it was really Bernie Garner and my mother Mag that were really getting behind it," Trevor recalls in an interview with *The Standard*.

"I said I'd put my hand up to get it started. I still remember, we were coming up with a name and my Mum said 'why do you want to be called after a boys team? Make your own name'. And that's when she came up with Mermaids."

Coaching the Mermaids, who are now playing in the Big V championship grade, was the turning point in Trevor's life.

Now 49, the father-of-two has forged a life around basketball. He is one of the nation's most successful coaches. He won his fourth NBL championship in six years on Sunday when he guided Perth Wildcats to an against-the-odds grand final win over

reigning champion Melbourne United. He's coached in America and South Korea and been an Australian Boomers assistant.

But wherever the game has taken him, lessons from his early days in Warrnambool resonate. Trevor took on the Seahawks' top job after two seasons with the Mermaids.

He was coaching friends he grew up with around west Warrnambool, including Tommy Greene and Anthony Haberfield, who flew to Perth last Friday to watch game four of the Wildcats' grand final series.

They were a powerful roster and stormed into the 1992 CVIBL grand final.

Trevor describes what happens next as "a blotch on the coaching record".

"We only lost one game in the regular season all year, that was at Swan Hill, and then we lost the final and I was pretty disappointed," he recalls.

"I made some mistakes as a coach. I wish I had the experience I do now because it would never have happened.

"Now a week before the playoffs we have a war games situation, where (we talk about) 'if a situation comes up in a game what are we going to do?'

"It was more pre-empting, getting organised so we're not surprised on game day when something happens.

"That is something I have always thought about because back then I made some mistakes."

Trevor grew up the youngest of five siblings in west Warrnambool.

Days were spent playing sport - football, basketball, whatever they could get their hands on - with brothers Anthony, Colin and Shane and sister Annie.

"Living in the commission homes, nothing was given to you for free. You had to earn your stripes, especially with older brothers who kept you in check," he says.

"With the sport it was 'you should be doing this better'. It just drove you, you had that fire burning inside you to be the best that you could be."

Long-time friend Lester Pickett, himself a basketball coach, remains in regular contact with Trevor, texting him before each game.

"He was a cheeky young lad. He loved his few beers and bit of trouble, nothing major, just a bit of fun," he says. "He was a normal young Warrnambool boy."

"He loved his sport and was a pretty good footballer. I coached him in the footy as well. He was captain of Old Collegians'



**PATH TO GLORY:** Trevor Gleeson coached Warrnambool Seahawks in 1992-93, taking them to a Victorian Country Invitational Basketball League grand final.



## weekender



**PASSIONATE:** Perth Wildcats coach Trevor Gleeson is known for his sideline antics. Those who know him best says it speaks volumes of his commitment to his teams. Picture: AAP

**FAMILY MAN:** Trevor Gleeson (back right) with brothers Colin and Anthony, mother Margaret and sister Annie in Warrnambool in 2013.

under 18s."

Lester says his good friend's achievements are amplified when you scroll through the heartache he's endured on a personal front in recent years.

He lost his mother, aged 74, to a stroke in 2013. It came just months after she was awarded Warrnambool Basketball Incorporated life membership for 40 years' service.

His oldest brother Anthony died while on a family holiday in Thailand in 2016 and his dad John passed away in 2017. Last year his brother-in-law Sepp Freitag died.

Trevor's wife Dawn, whom he met in America during Sioux Falls' 2003-04 season, has also battled breast cancer.

Trevor, a dad to Taj, 10, and Shea, 8, tries to focus on the positives memories.

His second family, the Perth Wildcats, have helped him navigate the dark times too.

"You've got great support around you and that's why when you have those moments, like winning a championship, it's so sweet that you can share those with people you love and care about," he says.

Mag watched her youngest boy start his professional career in Brisbane, enjoy five winning seasons with Townsville Crocs and move on in Perth after an abrupt end to his short-lived tenure at Melbourne Tigers.

He wishes she was there to watch him win his four titles (2013-14, '15-16, '16-17 and '18-19) with Perth.

"Mum was always there supporting me growing up and always went to the games and I am very thankful for that," Trevor reflects.

"She had a stroke in October 2013. I think it was my first game coaching (the Wildcats).

"She didn't see it because she was in hospital. I got back home to be with her which was fantastic.

"I wished she could have seen these last championships, she'd be proud as punch."

Trips across the Nullarbor are no longer the same either without Anthony.

"I still miss him today, every time I go to Melbourne I used to go around to his apartment and see him and catch up," he says.

Trevor's siblings helped shape him as a coach, as did those around him.

"It was always sport. My best mate lived around the corner, that was Michael 'Tocka' O'Keeffe who played cricket down at Footscray," he remembers.

"It was nearly everyday we'd do something sporting. We'd never sit at home and watch TVs or computers, it was always outdoors.

"That's where the love of basketball grew. My brothers played basketball so I was there at an early age, I was a mascot when I couldn't play. That competitive advantage really kicked in at a young age."

He's always been known for his animated antics on the sidelines, team-first approach and defensive mindset. The latter two are traits which epitomise the Wildcats' playing style. Long-time Warrnambool basketball administrator Bernie Garner, now 72,

believes Trevor has remained true to his coaching values. "He was one of those guys, you see them and they know what the game is all about," he says. "You could call him a bit of a sponge. He liked knowledge.

"I knew Trevor as a player before the Seahawks and Mermaids were even an entity.

"He was a good player. He had to give up playing because he got badly hurt working at the abattoirs. He couldn't play anymore and that's when he went into coaching.

"He was taught well too. His older brother Colin and Lester Pickett were two of the best country women's basketball coaches and they mentored him."

Bernie believes Trevor's commitment to succeed is what spills over on game day.

"Yes, he was always animated. I think it's his commitment more than anything else,"



he says. "Once he decided to do a job, it was 100 per cent commitment. When he's animated like that, that's what you're seeing.

"He places great stock in his players. If he thinks you should be in, he believes in you and will back you to the hilt."

Lester and Trevor still talk basketball. They have their agreements and disagreements. But their friendship remains steadfast. Lester has seen first-hand his mate's passion.

"He likes to get up and have a few words on the sidelines, as you know," he says. "He tests the referees as far as he can push them. He's always done it, gets his point across." Trevor knows he tends to stalk the sidelines.

"I was probably worse when I first started. I was a lot angrier a coach," he says. "It was my way or the highway back then. Things have changed, you've got to change with the times. When I started the coach ruled the roost and it was 'jump this high, run this fast'. Every year is different and I have learned a lot along the way.

"Your relationships with the players, that's the key to coaching."

Relationships have ensured Trevor maintains his Warrnambool links more than two decades after he left the region to go backpacking around the world before embarking on another adventure, this time as a professional coach.

"I am still in contact with plenty of people back home in Warrnambool. The texts and phone calls (are humbling) and when they come to a game in Melbourne they yell out and it's great to have that support," Trevor says. "They're all on the bandwagon wearing red." Work commitments make it hard for Trevor to visit but he enjoys the rare chances he does get to return to his roots.

"I'd like to get back one time for the May races again. I've got a few friends over here who keep on pestering me 'when are we going to the May carnival?'," he says.

"It's on the calendar, it's on the bucket list to get back there and catch up."

Of course, there will be handshakes and back slaps for the bloke they call 'Buds' when he does walk through the racecourse gates - a championship-winning coach but always a Warrnambool boy first and foremost.