

# Bandits steal the show



● Bandit Flenard Whitfield shoots over the reach of John Pichon. Picture: JOHN RUSSELL

## Albury holds off hot-shot Sabres in dramatic style



BY STEVE SMITH

FIRST they had it won, then they'd lost it, and then, finally, the Albury-Wodonga Bandits sealed the deal just in the nick of time.

Even when they win it seems, the Bandits just don't do things the easy way.

The Border club finally emerged triumphant from a close contest, defeating the hot-shooting Sandringham Sabres, 101-100, in a rollicking, drama-filled SEABL encounter at the Lauren Jackson Sports Centre on Saturday night.

Leading by as many as 15 points in the third quarter, the Bandits almost threw it all away in a thrilling final period, trailing 100-98 before import playmaker Jermel Jenkins ultimately settled matters with a spectacular pull-up three-pointer with 2.8 seconds remaining.

The Sabres, who were celebrating mere seconds earlier after Ben Kelly's triple had given them the lead, were subsequently unable to get a shot off in time, sparking scenes of jubilation from the raucous crowd of almost 900.

With his parents watching proudly from the stands, Jenkins set aside several weeks of poor form to top-score for the Border club with 24 points and six assists.

He was well supported by Nick Payne and Alex Opacic (20 points each) while forward Flenard Whitfield chimed in with a double-double of 13 points and 12 rebounds.

### STATS SHEET

Bandits	25	30	21	25	101
Sabres	25	20	23	32	100

Crowd: 892 at the Lauren Jackson Sports Centre

#### ALBURY-WODONGA BANDITS

Leading scorers: Jermel Jenkins 24, Alex Opacic 20, Nick Payne 20  
Leading rebounders: Flenard Whitfield 12, Alex Opacic 9, Ben Hollis 7  
Leading assists: Jermel Jenkins 6  
FG%: 42/88 48%; 3PT%: 10/26 38%; FT%: 7/10 70%

#### SANDRINGHAM SABRES

Leading scorers: John Pichon 22, Patrick Richard 22  
Leading rebounders: Patrick Richard 10, John Pichon 8, Nathan Crosswell 4  
Leading assists: Nathan Crosswell 3, Patrick Richard 3  
FG%: 36/68 53%; 3PT%: 10/21 48%; FT%: 18/25 72%

Lady Sabres	24	26	19	17	86
Lady Bandits	24	10	8	16	58

#### SANDRINGHAM LADY SABRES

Leading scorers: Micaela Cocks 29, Hope Terdich 22  
Leading rebounders: Georgia Stott 14, Micaela Cocks 10, Hope Terdich 9  
Leading assists: Sam Woosnam 4  
FG%: 28-69 41%; 3PT%: 1-11 9%; FT%: 29-36 81%

#### ALBURY-WODONGA LADY BANDITS

Leading scorers: Lonnik Thompson 14, Rachel Maenpaa 13  
Leading rebounders: Emma Mahady 8, Claire Miller 5, Lonnik Thompson 3  
Leading assists: Montana Farrah-Seaton 4  
FG%: 23-71 32%; 3PT%: 3-20 15%; FT%: 9-14 64%

Bench sparkplug Jack Duck provided several crucial late baskets to finish with 11 points on 4-5 shooting.

For Sandringham, the import combination of John Pichon and Patrick Richard proved a tough cover, with both forwards scoring 22 points.

Bandits coach Brad Chalmers admitted he was worried during Sandringham's comeback.

"For the most part we were pretty good and then that flat patch again probably comes from being on the losing end of those close ones," he said.

"I'm sick of seeing teams come in here and shoot high percentages, that's very frustrating.

"I don't think it was poor defence, just seems to be one of those gyms that people come into and have shot well.

"When you have a lead like that, I was worried but at the same time, I

was trying to say we could get this if we want it."

The Bandits came to play from the outset, showing a crispness to their offence that had been absent recently.

But Sandringham, like their female counterparts earlier, tied the scores at quarter-time, 25-apiece.

The arm-wrestle continued before the Bandits made a run to take a 55-45 lead on the back of Jenkins' buzzer-beater from international waters.

Leading by 12 points with less than eight minutes left, the Bandits seemed secure but the Sabres had other ideas.

A blistering 13-2 run brought the visitors to within a point before a Duck triple calmed nerves, at least momentarily.

The teams traded baskets in a frenetic final three minutes, neither able to grab the ascendancy until Jenkins' heroics.



● Bandits Rachel Maenpaa lines up on the basket. Pictures: JOHN RUSSELL

## Ladies fail to capitalise on strong start

BY STEVE SMITH

SAME story, different day.

The Albury-Wodonga Lady Bandits slumped to a 10th straight defeat in an all-too-familiar manner on Saturday night.

Effort was never a problem but a distinct lack of scoring punch combined with a rebound count slanted heavily against the Border club resulted in an 86-58 loss to the Sandringham Lady Sabres at Lauren Jackson Sports Centre.

Sandringham lived up to Lady Bandits coach James Ballinger's pre-match assessment as an elite SEABL outfit, withstanding a surprising first-quarter assault before racing away with the contest.

Lady Sabres guard Micaela

Cocks proved to be unstoppable with 29 points and 10 rebounds, with Hope Terdich the ideal inside foil, adding 22 points and nine boards.

Albury-Wodonga's import duo of Lonnik Thompson and Rachel Maenpaa led with 14 and 13 points respectively but the Lady Bandits again struggled for scoring depth.

Ballinger, while pleased with his team's overall effort, admitted his charges needed to learn to maintain a high standard of play, even while fatigued.

"The first quarter, I loved how much width and energy we played with, everyone was moving and we were in a flow," Ballinger said.

"The rest of the game, we were condensed but Sandringham is a quality team.

"We did it for a quarter and we need to evolve to do that for longer."

An entertaining first quarter saw the hosts go blow-for-blow with their opponents, leading by as many as eight before Sandringham closed with a flurry to force a 24-24 tie by the close.

But a dominant second stanza from the Lady Sabres put paid to any notions the Border club had of causing a boilover, with the visitors sprinting away to a 50-34 lead at the main break.

Sandringham extended its advantage to 69-42 with 10 minutes to play.

It was all academic from there, with the Lady Bandits — although continuing to work hard — incapable of reducing the margin by any appreciable amount.



● Emma Mahady moves away from Sam Woosnam.