

# **The Screaming Eagle**

## **talks to Senior Championship Head Coach Warren Estcourt**



### **Screaming Eagle (SE)**

Hi Warren, thanks for taking the time to talk to me. You've now in your second season at Diamond Valley as head coach of our Senior Championship men's program. To say you've been around the block as a coach would be a bit of an understatement, but before we get into that, I always like to find out a bit about people's early days. How did life and basketball start for Warren Estcourt.

### **Warren Estcourt (WE)**

I was born in Tasmania with a little brother being born five minutes after me. I didn't originally start playing basketball, I was more into footy, starting in under 10's and going through to about year 10. I was lucky enough to play in some Tassie rep teams.

### **SE**

So how was life growing up in the Apple Isle, where did you live?

My brother and I grew up in Hobart. Life was pretty tough when we were kids, we didn't have much so sport was pretty important to us. One thing I always wanted was a bike and the only way I eventually got it was by selling my skateboard. I always liked to know how things worked, so when I got it, it took me five minutes to completely strip it down, and a week to work out how to put it back together!

### **SE**

So when did you start playing basketball and how did you go?

### **WE**

First time I picked up a basketball was when I was about 14. Once I started I was hooked, there are just so many facets to the game and it was a real eye opener for me, I just loved every part of the game right from the start. From then on it seemed like I always had a basketball in my hand. Because I started late I always thought I had a point to prove so I used to shoot every single day, before school, in breaks, after school, every day on the holidays, wind, rain, 35 degrees, whatever.

### **SE**

35 degrees? In Tasmania? Seems like you were hooked on the game?

**WE**

Yea 35 degrees sounds hard to believe but we got that there every now and again. No doubt I was hooked and I just felt I had to get better because I wasn't very good at the start. All I could do was a through the legs dribble, take charges, dive on loose balls and annoy people.

**SE**

Annoy people? Trash talk from Warren Estcourt? I'm betting your current players wouldn't find that hard to believe!

**WE**

Annoy people as in bend the rules as far as I could. If I was in your head, and you were thinking about me, you weren't thinking about the game. Once you score on someone a few times you let them know about it. Even when they were on the bench. I was always pretty vocal.

**SE**

You must have improved pretty quickly because you moved up the ranks at a reasonable rate of knots?

**WE**

I was pretty lucky but also put in a lot of work. I was lucky enough to play Tassie state under 20's. I wasn't good enough to make 18's and my first year I couldn't afford to go away. Second year was in Geelong and I managed to raise the money to go and it was a real eye opener in relation to where you stood against the other states. We didn't win a game, but we were competitive for the most part. WA won it, they had Longley and Vlahov and they even beat the Vics who were stacked. I was in the Hobart Tassie Devils NBL squad that year, but had to quit to get a job and then the next year I quit my job to play and played in nine games.



**SE**

Nine games in your first year, and some big minutes in a few of the games as a 19 year old is not a bad effort. What was the NBL like in 1988?

**WE**

The imports were much better then. Every team had quality Australians and two imports, there were teams all over Australia and it was a rough league. No one really went to College or Europe in those days so the teams were stacked.

**SE**

You came to Melbourne the next year, how did that come about?

**WE**

At the time I felt Melbourne was the basketball capital of Australia and at that time there weren't any SEABL teams in Tassie so I moved to Melbourne to play SEABL for Broadmeadows, and then a couple of years at North East Melbourne SEABL which was the feeder team to the Coburg Giants NBL team, then a year overseas, a year at Shepparton SEABL and a then couple of years at Keilor SEABL.

**SE**

And while all that was going on your started your coaching career, how did that come about?

**WE**

I first started coaching in Tasmania, it was an under 16 boy's team and I was only about 18, so coaching has always been a presence for me and an interest. I really got into coaching in my first year at the Hume City Broncos. I was a senior player and, as always, the junior side of the program was looking for coaches, it seemed like a good idea at the time so I put my hand up. In my first couple of years I coached under 18 and 20 boys, I was lucky because I had a great squad of kids which was good because I was only 19 or 20 years old myself.

It's also just a natural evolution from playing to coaching, and back and forth. Maybe I'll make a comeback to playing next year, why not!

**SE**

To quote the AFL TV ads of some time ago, "I'd like to see that"!! Looking over your CV, you played and coached, coached and played, it just seems to have been your life?

**WE**

Played under 16 for my first year in 1983 and have played or coached in every single year since.

**SE**

You joined the state coaching ranks at what many would think was a pretty young age of around 28, tell me about that?

**WE**

I was coaching under 18 girls at Keilor and we were actually pretty good. They were all bottom age and we finished fourth at the Classic. We just used to trap everybody, all game, every possession, it was great fun. Mark Wright coached the Melbourne under 18 team and I enjoyed coaching against him. When the state job came up, I said I would do the AC job if he was Head Coach, because I thought I could learn something off him. That got back to Mark and then I was AC for the under 18 State team. The first year we got a bronze and then we went onto to get the gold the next two years in a row. The bronze medal was a blessing, because it taught us how to win and what it took to win. I still know exactly where that bronze medal is, I couldn't tell you where the gold medals are. I also coached the under 20 state team for three years. We won two silvers and a gold medal. During that period I was lucky enough to coach a host of future WNBL and WNBA stars, Penny Taylor, Nat Porter, Deanna Smith, Aneka Kerr, Caitlin Ryan, Gabe Richards, Kelly Wilson and Dee Butler, just to name a few.

**SE**

You then took another step up and was AC in Dandenong's 2001 WNBL team, tell me about that?

**WE**

Mark Wright was coaching WNBL that year and I was lucky enough to get an AC job with him and continue the relationship. We made the preliminary final but lost to the eventual champs Canberra I think from memory.

**SE**

And while all this state and WNBL coaching business is going on, you are still playing at a pretty high level, Waverley and Bulleen in the Big V, getting some big minutes and putting up some big numbers. You were clearly a shooter and didn't mind a shot from downtown. I reckon you never died wondering?



**WE**

Someone asked me why do you shoot so many threes? Because there are no fours! I was / am a shooter. Shooters shoot. It was my niche and skill so I just shot it, you have to be confident. Although the day of the pull up three in transition seems to be numbered. I used to shoot that shot every time. It's just a dagger.

**SE**

In those days you were playing regularly against Diamond Valley, and some legends of the club in Marcus Todd and Warwick Straw, as well as well as one of your current players, a very young Adam Moore. What was it like playing against the Eagles and in particular those guys?

**WE**

Marcus and Warwick were very tough matchups. Marcus would be working you over at one end and then Warwick would be lighting you up at the other end. Adam Moore? Adam who? Come on, he would have been on the end of the bench, I'm not even sure I would have noticed him at the end of the game when we shook hands. haha

**SE**

You moved to Sherbrooke in 2008 as an assistant coach and took the head coaching reigns in 2009, then saw their transition from Division 1 into State Championship in 2011. Fair drive to Sherbrooke so you must have been keen, tell me about your time at Sherbrooke?

**WE**

Loved it. Frank Woodhouse gave me a gig in 2008 when no one else would and we had a great season. We should have won it but we had some key injuries in the last month of the season. I am eternally grateful to Frank for the opportunity he gave me to be part of the Sherbrooke family. We had another great year in 2009 and in 2010 went up to Champ Men.

**SE**

In your second year in State Chamionship with Sherbrooke in 2011, the team finished a more than credible third losing the semi to eventual champions Waverley, you won the Big V Coach of the Year award and had a player in the league All Star Five. That must have been pretty special, given the massive jump between Division 1 and State Championship?

**WE**

2011 we finished third, with no imports or NBL players in a stacked league. Johnny Lee made All Star guard and we just had one of those seasons where everyone complimented each other and no one cared about stats. Our leading scorer only averaged 13 points per game but we had eight different guys score over 20 points in a game during the year. It was just a great TEAM and probably the best group I've ever been a part of.

**SE**

And while doing that you had another crack at an AC role with Dandenong in the WNBL including a title in 2011.

**WE**

After that year Mark got me back on board at Dandenong and we won our last eight or nine straight to win the Championship. I was very fortunate to be a part of yet another fantastic group of players who sacrificed personal achievements to win a Championship. Isiah Thomas calls it "The Secret." and the secret is that it isn't about basketball, it's about teammates and sacrificing yourself for the greater good of the team. We had that at Sherbrooke in 2011 and the Dandenong girls learned it that year as well.

**SE**

You're a copper, what drew you to a career in the police force, what role are you currently in and what does that involve?

**WE**

I've been in the job for 19 years and I've been a Detective for about eight. It involves catching crooks, investigating offences in our patch around the North Melbourne and Kensington areas and keeping the peace. It's a very multicultural district so we have to be understanding of the different cultures and attitudes in the area. I'm naturally inquisitive and analytical and I like to see what people are doing and why. I enjoy protracted investigations and compiling a case against people who choose to break the law. You break the law and there are consequences; that's us.

**SE**

So here you are in 2013, you apply for the head coach role at Diamond Valley and get the job. Why Diamond Valley and what made you apply, particularly as your gig at Sherbrooke was going reasonably well?

**WE**

I had been at Sherbrooke for 5 years and it was time to go. Coaches and players have a shelf life and quite simply mine was up. After a while, unless you clean out the roster, you have to move on. I had always admired Diamond Valley and its culture and it seemed like a natural progression.

**SE**

You've been here just short of two full seasons, what do you like most about the place, and do you dislike most about the place, it's Ok, you can tell me, I won't tell anyone!

**WE**

I like the family atmosphere and the feeling at DV, its history and tradition. I think we need to do a better job recognising the people and players that have made the Club so great. Nothing is made in a day, a week, a month or even a year. It's a progression from the years of work that everyone before us has done. We need to do a better job acknowledging that.

**SE**

I like both those answers. As I said at the start, you've been around the block plenty of times and seen a lot of basketball, tell me the two best players you have played with and why?

**WE**

Steve Carfino, he was a college player in the the USA, was drafted to the NBA and ended up in Australia playing in the NBL in Hobart and then the Sydney Kings. In my opinion he should have been MVP in the NBL in the year Ray Borner won it, Steve could shoot, score, pass, defend, he was an amazing athlete.

Scott Fisher, played with the North Melbourne Giants, Perth Wildcats and Sydney Kings and also represented Australia. He was just the ultimate professional and could just flat out play, it was just inspirational to be on the same team as him. He made you play better just by his presence on the floor and in the locker room.

**SE**

What about the two best players you played against, must have been a couple of tough opponents over the journey?

**WE**

Andrew Gaze, certainly needs no introduction, he was just so smart and such a good scorer.

Rod Johnson who played NBL with the Coburg Giants and could just fill it up. Six foot, could score from anywhere, inside, outside, just such a tough cover. He ripped me up for 50 one night, and I thought I actually played pretty good D. He was just unstoppable!!



**SE**

Some great names in there. OK, what about the people who influenced the way you play, who were the two best coaches you have had and why?

**WE**

My first 'proper' coach was Don Hanson, an American who coached me in Tassie. He made me a better player and a better person and was a father figure for me when I was a kid. He was responsible for fixing my shot.

Graham Longstaff coached me in SEABL, he was a great coach who made you want to play hard for him, I just felt that I never wanted to let him down, ever. Under him I used to feel physically sick if we lost.

**SE**

What about the two best you have coached and why?

**WE**

Jonathon Lee, hands down the best guard, maybe even the best player I have ever coached. He is a great defender, runs the team to perfection and knows exactly what the team needs and was therefore just an extension of me as a coach on the floor. I would think of an offence to run, and he would call it on the floor before I even spoke with him. Defensively he was the tip of the spear for us, guarded the opposition team's best player every week and he just shut people down. His full court D set the tempo for us every game. He's a winner and he knows exactly what it takes to win at both ends.

Jenna O'Hea, she is just an ultimate professional. Came to 'work' every day, shoots, runs, does strength work, Pilates, sprint work, rehab, everything. Shoots 90% in her individuals, rarely misses a session and very smart.

**SE**

The questions get tougher, what about the best you have ever seen?

**WE**

Gaze, Fisher and Carfino who I all talked about before. Obviously I have seen NBA players but I am not counting them. I would also give an honorable mention to Lauren Jackson, I coached against her at Nationals. We beat her during the week and worked our whole defensive schemes around stopping her which we did ..... once. Then she adjusted and came out in the final and had 45 points and 20 rebounds, playing every minute of the game.



It was one of the most dominant performances I've ever seen, particularly when you remember we had Penny Taylor and Nat Porter in our team. And she played the whole 40 minutes and was fist pumping her way past our bench on every single play. It was ridiculous, we couldn't stop her, it was like standing in front of a Tsunami.

**SE**

Plenty of teams at State Championship level have imports, some paying big big money, if rumours are true total team spending north of \$80,000 per season. What's your take on imports?

**WE**

Necessary? I'm not really sure, it depends what value the club puts in winning and or developing their own talent. I'm not talking Diamond Valley here, just a general across the board comment. The problem is, as a club, you develop your own talent and the best ones go to College in the States or to SEABL and you lose them. So where does that leave you? In the mud. If you have a glaring deficiency in your group, size, scoring or whatever, then an import may be necessary to fill that gap to remain competitive. This is especially the case in Big V this year, the league has gone from four or five imports last year to 15 this year. The small teams are being 'imported' out. It makes it almost impossible to win a title and very, very difficult to even make the playoffs.

**SE**

You coached a DV domestic All Star team at CBS last December, and from speaking with several of the kids and parents after the game, they thought you were great. Clearly you seemed to enjoy it. How was it from your point of view, and will we see you coaching a Junior Championship team at Diamond Valley in the future?

**WE**

I was actually very nervous about coaching the team but they were great! Made me feel welcome and I really enjoyed it. And remember the result, Estcourt 1 – McAughtry 0! As far as coaching is concerned, it really depends on time. Between work, coaching the Champ Men, scouting, watching tape, doing individuals with the boys and time at home, there doesn't seem to be any time left. When I have kids, I will be coaching them no doubt.

**SE**

You've coached both boys and girls, any preference?

**WE**

Girls listen more and, often, do a better job than the boys, simply because they can't jump over or around people. They usually execute better and listen to instruction better. The boys look at you and think they know better, trust me, they don't. But the battle is making them do what you want and what is better for the team.

**SE**

What would you say was the most significant difference between coaching juniors and seniors?



**WE**

Confidence, self belief and egos. As Coach Popp says, players have to get over themselves. Some never do.

**SE**

What does the coaching future hold for Warren Estcourt?

**WE**

Coaching. Learning. Every day I learn something about myself, my players, coaching, sets, what works, what doesn't work, plays, sets, defensive rules and adjustments. The day you stop learning is the day you should quit. If I muck something up, I always resolve to be better next time and never, ever, make that mistake again.

**SE**

My last question, if you could do three things at Diamond Valley with no restriction, what would you do, don't be afraid to dream big?

**WE**

Firstly I'd play all Senior Championship games at CBS, magnificent venue, takes us in the future and is a great place to play and train.

Secondly I'd have both our State Champ men's and women's teams in SEABL after we win the Big V. You need to build the Club up. If we are static - we are in decline. We HAVE to keep moving forward and improving.

And finally I'd like to see a better relationship between the Senior Championship program and the domestic program. Even in my time it has improved and seems to get better all the time with some work that has been done, but it can always improve as we have to keep moving forward.

**SE**

Once again, some different answers to what is always my last question. One thing I have found in all my interviews is that the more you ask the more you find out, and that there is always a lot more to people than we know about under the surface if we just scratch a little bit.

Thanks Warren for giving so freely of your time, the Screaming Eagle salutes you.