

So far the last 2 years of my life have been dedicated solidly to the game of basketball and it has been worth every single bit of it. I am going into my 3rd year on scholarship at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in Canberra for Basketball and only 18 years old. When people see our busy schedules and the amount of hard work that gets put into this program they can't believe we are still playing this game. I am telling you now that it has been the best 2 years of my life and I would not take back any second of it.

I came to the AIS in December 2009 when I was 16. Although I was greatly excited to become a scholarship holder, there were lots of scary thoughts going through my mind. Living away from home for the first time, missing my family and friends, meeting new people, going to a new school, becoming independent and doing all that adult stuff that your parents do for you. (washing included) I arrived at this amazing sporting place to be shown straight to my room. Living with 14 other girls can be a challenge but we were all going through the same thing at the time and understood when others needed space or a little bit of alone time.

Firstly I will explain the whole living experience. There are about 150 athletes that live on site, 3 stories with about 6 different blocks. I was lucky enough to live with 2 Victorian's who I knew quite well before hand. You have a shared lounge room, kitchen, washer and dryer along with 2 showers and 2 bathrooms. We all have our own separate rooms which you can move and add furniture. It took me about 2 weeks to deck out my room with pictures, posters, photos and every other homely thing I could find.

Now onto the basketball side of things. The AIS clearly is the best place for you to be if you want to develop as a player and a person. I went from training twice a week and playing once to training 3 times

a day. It gets hard, physically and mentally, especially on my body. Because of the increased training loads and getting told to gain weight I ended up with 5 stress fractures last year. Not fun, let me tell you that. One of my worries before I got here was how on earth would I fit basketball training, school, physio and massage appointments on top of all the team meetings along with eating and sleeping into my day and still have a social life. Also getting the chance to have some time to just zone out and relax, a bit of me time. My first 2 weeks here were stressful but then I learnt how to manage my time better and it just got easier from there. Our Monday schedule would go like this:

- 6:30 weights
- Breakfast and showers (Shower if you had time, I know, ew.)
- School for 2 subjects
- Bus it back for individuals for an hour
- Shower then school for 2 subjects
- Come back for lunch
- Go back to school for the rest of your subjects
- Come back for team training which went for 2 hours
- Recovery (spa and Ice cold plunge pools)

By this time it would be about 6:45pm

- Dinner
- Study hall for 2 hours. (dedicated to home work 😞)
- Get back into your room at 9:30
- I'm normally exhausted by this time so it would be straight to bed.

I have to admit, Monday's were our hardest day and not every day was like that. Just like everyone says, 'I hate Mondays'

It's awesome living here and like I have said, loved every moment of it. The people you meet the opportunities you get and the friends that you make are amazing. You live with your teammates and at first you are friends which lead into good mates. This then goes onto becoming best friends and then sisters. One of the hardest things about the AIS would be that everyone leaves at some stage. You know so many different people from all over Australia and from different sports but at some stage you have to move on with your life and go onto better and bigger things. One of my best friends lives in England playing soccer with Redding as one of the youngest ever. Another one is playing for Butler College in America. It's sad to see them leave but because you become so close to them you always manage to find ways to stay in touch. One of my favourite things would be Skype or Viber (free calls or messages all around the world)

As I mentioned before, the opportunities you get from being an AIS scholarship holder are fantastic. Recently I got asked to go to Sydney to promote Gatorades new 1,2,3 series along with 2 other girls and 3 boys. Just the fact that I got asked was incredible but what was even better was that Dwayne Wade was also coming along to promote it and we got to spend time with him. As star struck I was to see Dwayne wade and personally meet him, this feeling kept going as Brett Lee, Lote Tuqiri, Geoff Huegill and mo'onia Gerrard were also there and joining in on the promotion.

That is just one example. We also get to play in the main Australian women's Pro league the WNBL. This is such a great experience and it shows you how far you have to go to become the best in Australia. We are playing against girls such as Jenna O'Hea, Liz Campbage, Belinda Snell and I even had the chance to verse Lauren Jackson last

year. It is a big eye opener and I look forward to getting to play each week. We recently won our first game against the Townsville Fire on Friday by one point. We have now bumped them down the ladder from 2nd to 4th. My next 2 games back in Victoria is on the 10th of December against Bendigo at the Bendigo stadium and then Sunday the 11th of December against Bulleen at the Veneto Club in Bulleen.

Now after being here for a while and improving your game you become to realise that you actually have a shot of making it. My goals are to make the Opals for the 2016 Olympics and then hopefully getting a chance of playing in the WNBA. Going over to Europe is also an idea of mine that I would like to achieve. I just want to say that it is possible. If you have the right mind set and work hard anything is possible. My dad always told me 'whether you think you can or think you can't ... you are always right.' From this day he still thinks I never listen to him or take his advice on board but I did and I still do. He is right in saying that, your mind is a powerful thing. I always remind myself that if you think you are working hard, I can almost guarantee that someone out there is working harder than you. This always inspires me to put in that little bit more effort and try that tiny bit harder. Hopefully it works out in the long run. Another thing, It's so hard when you have to ... but so easy when you want to.