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## Local AAU Team Wins National Tournament

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Nine area high school basketball players came back to the Alleghenies Sunday night as national champions.

The PA Blue Thunder, a local AAU basketball club which competes in national tournaments throughout the year, won the Deep South Classic in the Girls 15-and-under division at the University of North Carolina Sunday morning, defeating Air Oklahoma (Edmond, OK) 54-43. It is believed to be the area's first AAU national tournament championship.

"I couldn't be happier for the kids," said Blue Thunder Head Coach Doug Roberts. "They really deserved it."

The team consists of nine freshmen and sophomores from local high schools; Janae Dunchak (Northern Cambria), Brittany Eisenhuth (Ferndale), Taylor Gruss (Conemaugh Valley), Alyson Leyo (Harmony), Marraya Moyer (Altoona), Paige Robertson (Altoona), Alexis Valentine (Mifflinburg), Bryanna Valentine (Mifflinburg), and Alli Williams (Bishop Guilfoyle).

A tournament with 250 teams, the Deep South Classic took place over the weekend at Duke University, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina. The girls played Sunday's championship game on the center-court of the Dean Smith Center. PA Blue Thunder defeated five teams on their way to the title, including squads from Dallas, Richmond, Va., and Dayton, Oh.

"It really says great things about (high school basketball) in the area," Roberts said. "It's nice to see kids from a small area get the recognition they deserve."

Roberts added multiple Blue Thunder players are getting recruited by numerous Division-I college basketball programs.

Their success over the weekend should come as no surprise to those who follow this team on a regular basis. PA Blue Thunder was a runner-up at the Syracuse AAU National Qualifier in June 2007, and finished in third at the United States Junior National Tournament last July.

"These are just 15 year-olds, just kids," Roberts stressed, "but it doesn't surprise me that we won the entire thing. Our success rate last year was high. I'm not surprised we won all five (games)."

Roberts feels he knows exactly why his girls have been so successful, too. He said all the of players on the team rank in the top of their high school classes academically, and attributes that directly to their success on the court.

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"Our kids are just incredibly smart," the coach said. "We can just draw up a play in the middle of the game. They're not lost. They understand concepts and make it work. These kids are exceedingly mentally tough, and very intelligent."

PA Blue Thunder will play their next tournament at the Syracuse Pre-Nationals in mid-June before playing in the Penn State Blue Chip tournament in early June and the US Junior Nationals in Washington D.C. at the end of the month. However, while this group of nine girls may go on to win many more national tournaments, the experience of the past weekend is one Doug Roberts will not soon forget.

"It's like a dream coaching these kids," he said. "This is the best group of kids I've ever been around."

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