

31/3/14

On Friday 28th March top Australian junior table tennis player and Orbost Secondary College student Darcie Morton was recognised by the East Gippsland Sports Foundation as the inaugural east Gippsland Junior Athlete of the Year for outstanding achievement, commitment, contribution and attitude to her sport over 2013. The highly successful awards evening at the Bairnsdale RSL was well supported with attendance of over 150 athletes, patrons and supporters of the East Gippsland Sports Foundation.

Darcie's older brother Damon Morton was also recognised with an Achievement Award for his recent results in Biathlon where he placed 11th and 15th in the 7.5km Sprint and 10km Pursuit Event at the World Youth and Junior Championships in Presque Isle, US. The results were the best ever for an Australian at this level of competition and qualifies Damon to compete in the open International Biathlon Union Cups/world circuit. As Damon has one more year in the U19 age category it demonstrates that he is on track to medal at the next World Junior Championships in Belarus in February, 2015, and is on track to make the next Winter Olympics in 2018.

The following is a report by Darcie on her recent training and competitions in Europe.

FROM THE WORLD CADET CHALLENGE TO TRAINING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

On 26th October I flew with the Oceania team to Vienna, Austria. We trained there for four days leading up to the World Cadet Challenge (WCC) in Slovenia where I placed 31st in the Girls Singles.

In early 2014 I trained at Havirov, Czech Republic for a month leading up to the Czech Junior and Cadet Open, which is the first of the World Junior Series events in table tennis.

Havirov is a small, industrial city on the Polish border and close to Ostrava. I found the training very enjoyable and rewarding. It was great to train with lots of juniors my own age and standard, which I think really helped with my game play and match play. During with my time there I trained with the local team and filled in for the Czech Woman's Super League, which is the highest domestic competition for women in the Czech Republic.

The Czech Junior Open was staged in Hondonin and 48 mostly European nations participated. Table tennis has the most member federations of any sport in the world with 220 countries. I played in a mixed team with an Austrian girl and contested the junior (U18) and cadet (U15) singles and doubles. My highlight was winning a doubles round against a top Polish team.

I returned to Australia on 1st March to contest the Youth Olympic Qualifying Tournament. Even though I was unsuccessful in qualifying for this team I was selected for the U21 AUS Girls Team for the senior Oceania Championships team to be played in Bendigo over Easter.

I've also recently been selected to the Australian Junior team to play in the Oceania Cadet qualifying event and Oceania Championships in the Cook Islands from 20th May 2014.

On 8-9th March I played at the Junior and Senior Dandenong Open where I won the U15 girls singles and doubles title. In the senior Women's Open I played Miao Miao, who is a 4 time Olympian for AUS, in the semi-finals, which was a great experience. I thought I played well to take 8 and 9 points in the first two games and force Miao to play hard.

I would like to recognise the following for their recent support:

- The East Gippsland Sports Foundation for their support and recognition as the inaugural east Gippsland Athlete of the Year and \$2000 sporting scholarship.
- Nikolas Endal – the Chairman of the Havirov Table Tennis Club and Vice President of Table Tennis in Czech Republic, who was instrumental in organising my stay and training with his club in Havirov.
- The Victorian Government Elite Athlete Travel Grant
- The Latrobe Convention Centre Traralgon for their ongoing support
- Nittaku Japan for their fantastic sponsorship of my bat, rubbers, shoes and playing gear.
- My coach Mark Smythe
- Table Tennis Australia where I am a member of the U18 Junior Squad
- Table Tennis Oceania for supporting me to the World Cadet Challenge