

# Teen netballers secure silver

Counties Manukau's U17 team finished second at the recent New Zealand Age Group netball tournament in Hamilton from July 25 to 28 after heading into the final unbeaten.

Even though they lost 29-27 to Wellington in the final, it was a huge accomplishment for the team made up of players from the different centres in the area.

The atmosphere at Minogue Park was buzzing from when the sun rose as 380 players competed in the final day of the tournament.

The two undefeated teams of the tournament went head to head in the final as Wellington and Counties Manukau took to the court amidst cheers from supporters and the other 30 teams that had played throughout the week.

The game lived up to the U17 finals reputation of quick-paced, body-on-the-line, spirited netball.

It was a game where the quarter scores told the story as the team that controlled the game switched back and forth at different stages.

Just as you thought one team were going to surge ahead the other valiantly fought back to stop any chance of getting behind to play catch-up netball.

Counties Manukau surged ahead in the beginning of the opening quarter with agile centre Nicole Jenson evading the Wellington midcourt with



**LEAPS AND BOUNDS:** Counties Manukau's Stephanie Collins catches the ball and prepares herself to pass in their final against Wellington on July 28. Photo: MICHAEL BRADLEY

her deceptive movement through court.

But Wellington, instructed by coach Waimarama Tau- maunu, quickly awoke to the challenge and scored six goals on the run to lead after the opening stanza 8-6.

A key playmaker for Wel-

lington, goal attack Sharnii Lintern, led her team's controlled and decisive movement through court as she stood up to the tight and dynamic defence of gifted Counties defender Elizabeth Ene.

The attacking end for Counties Manukau were

guilty of not taking their feet to the ball in the second quarter, leaving space for the Wellington defensive duo of Maggie Bone and Victoria Miller to come through and snatch some intercepts.

Going into half time Counties Manukau were down by three, they made two changes to their line up and came out firing in the third as they began to find their flow.

Wing attack Stephanie Collins and goal attack Olivia van Diepen found a new level of understanding and worked seamlessly to get the ball to shooter Ashleigh Fennessy.

Taking to the court in the third, Counties Manukau goal keep tightened her defensive line up, picking off some spectacular intercepts to help her team gain the edge going into the last quarter 22-21.

In the last quarter it was all on but it was Wellington who responded to their coach saying "move your feet" and rose to the occasion and played with confidence and composure.

Wing attack Crystal Lawrence had an outstanding third quarter, keeping her opposition on her back and hitting the circle edge with well-timed drives.

In the last minute a ball rolling out of the hoop for Wellington almost saw Counties Manukau even the score but it wasn't to be as Wellington reclaimed before the final whistle blew.