



MIGHTY WOMBATS

make it back-to-back wins in collegiate games

Team sickness, high altitude and nosebleeds proved additional challenges, but no barrier to victory for WASM's Wombats at the 38th Annual International Collegiate Mining Competition in Montana.

It was their second consecutive victory at the games with a "three-peat" an ambitious aim for 2017. The victory over teams from America, Brazil, the UK and Queensland was made even sweeter with the Wombat B team taking second place while a women's Wallaby team was pipped for victory by just one point.

Wombats team leader Alex Cutler said competition had been intense, but comprehensive preparation had provided the vital edge in team victory.

"As a club, we insist on a very high level of preparation for the competition and a serious attitude," he said. "This is a team competition; there is little room for individuals, and the team must come first."

Mr Cutler said the Wombats focused on technique in training and arrived early in Butte, Montana, to acclimatise to the cold weather and altitude. WASM has won the open (or men's) division 12 times since 1999.

There were two WASM mining games teams – the Wombats, based in Kalgoorlie, and the Wallabies, based in Bentley. The competition took place over three days and included training and familiarisation.

It comprised seven events: Hand Steel, Muck, Swede Saw, Survey, Gold Pan, Airleg (or Jackleg in American terminology) and Track Stand. Here's how they worked:

- **Hand Steel:** Drilling into a concrete block with a hammer and chisel; greatest depth wins
- **Muck:** Shoveling muck (dirt) into an old-fashioned muck cart (mine cart); quickest time wins
- **Swede Saw:** Sawing through a six inch block of wood; quickest time wins – penalties for deviation

- **Airleg:** Drilling with an airleg drill into concrete; greatest depth wins
- **Track Stand:** Building a short section of railway track; shortest time wins. Various technical penalties
- **Gold Pan:** panning for five pieces of "gold"(usually lead); quickest time wins. Penalties for losing pieces
- **Survey:** Completing a short survey course in a set time; closest to actual Easting and Northing wins.

All events are five-person, except for survey and airleg, which are contested by two team members.

Mr Cutler said Wombats prided themselves on their performance in the hand steel and muck events. "The key to winning, however, is being consistently good across events, not winning by a large margin in a few key events," he said. "Every event is key, and we train to be strong in all events."

Testing environmental conditions really extended competitors with at least 30 per cent of the WA teams falling sick, while even short bouts of cardio proved winding. "There were copious nosebleeds, including on event days," Mr Cutter said.

The Wombat "A" team topped the Swede Saw and Hand Steel, coming second in Muck and Pan, and third in Track. The "B" team came first in Pan, second in Survey and third in Muck. "They went extremely close in Muck with only a second separating the Wombats' teams," Mr Cutler said.

Mr Cutler said WASM's strong performance in the competition could be attributed to team culture and the strength of its mining community heritage. "It's a combination of a serious approach, strong team focus and dynamic, the investment in training new competitors and strong support from the mining and associated communities," he said.

"It's going to be very challenging to win three titles in a row. The standard of competition is very high and the American teams have a size advantage. "We mitigate that through training, fitness, and technique, however this is a physical

competition and the size of the Americans is advantageous," Mr Cutler said.

Victory was celebrated with a slab of Emu Export that flew in with the team along with a few tots of warming rum.

Mr Cutler said the games were a great chance to meet future mining professionals and leaders from the US and other countries.

"Much of what we learn at university is derived from US research or mining texts, and this competition provides us with an opportunity to interact with students, professors, and schools involved," he said. "We also have the opportunity to tour mines and mining communities. Butte, Montana, was once the site of one of the largest copper mines in the world; a kind of American Kalgoorlie. "The opportunity for students to experience mining beyond Western Australia is invaluable," Mr Cutler said.



The Wombats are generously sponsored by mining and associated companies, such as Rio Tinto, which was the Gold Sponsor in 2016