Special Games gong glory

Special Olympians with medals won at the World Games: from left, swimmer Shane Branch and basketballers Tania Wright and William Rogers.

By JOHN BRIGGS

SOME very special Olympians breezed into Hobart Airport yesterday, weighed down with medals.

Swimmer Shane Branch and basketballers Tania Wright and William Rogers were the southern athletes among nine Tasmanians to collect medals of different hues at the Special Olympic World Games, in New Haven, Connecticut last week.

Branch has two silvers from freestyle relays and individual bronze medals in the 200-metres freestyle and 100-metres backstroke.

He described the Games as a wonderful experience and said he hoped to return for more competition with fellow intellectually disabled athletes.

"The best thing was marching in the opening and closing ceremony," said Branch.

The two basketballers agreed and Rogers said it was a thrill and relief when the final siren sounded in the match which gave the Aussies the bronze medal.

Wright said the whole experience was exciting and the athletes had a chance to make new friends and even time to visit Disneyland and other attractions in the US.

The three southerners and their northern counterparts returned to their homes yesterday.

Launceston track and field athlete Gavin Sutton picked up a silver medal in the 200-metres sprint and 100-metres walk.

The northern members of the basketball team were Leslie Westwood and Emma Porter.

The other Tasmanians to triumph were Monica Barrett, Tina Kenna and Cathy McKrimmon, who were part of the gold-medal winning team in softball.

One of the coaches who accompanied the team, Karen Reed, said the Games were a great success and many international friendships had been formed.

More than 7000 athletes from 142 countries attended the Games.

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