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**MARCO McGOWAN**

FOUR Northern Territory tennis players are back in the Top End after dominating a three-week stretch of South Australian tournaments.

Liam Franklin, Peter Politis and Jett Leong won a combined five singles titles across bronze, white and silver graded national points events at Strathalbyn, Seaside and Mildwood.

Thirteen-year-old Franklin captured the under-14 boys’ titles at Strathalbyn and Millswood and lost a high-quality Seaside final 6-4, 6-4 to Japan’s Kiichi Ishida.

Politis, who turns 12 in December, took out the under-12 boys’ Strathalbyn and Millswood deciders, while Leong, also 12, won the Seaside crown in the same age group.

Another Darwin up-and-comer, 14-year-old Kyle O’Dooghue-Ellis, performed well in reaching the under-14 boys’ semi-finals at Strathalbyn and Seaside and the last eight at Mildwood.

Tennis NT coach and development manager Pat Coburn said the quartet’s strong results boded well for their future prospects.

“I’ve had kids go down to Adelaide and dominate before and both those kids (Kassandra Dunser and Emma Lahessa) ended up with Tennis Australia scholarships,” Coburn said.

Coburn was particularly excited about Franklin, who he said was “as good a kid as I’ve ever coached” for his impressive athleticism.

“He’s got a body built for tennis,” Coburn said.

“I took him to a national 10s camp and at that camp he lost to an ACT guy on the bottom court, so he was at the bottom of the bottom, but now he’s challenging at the top of that group.

“We’re running into a bit of uncharted waters, but I think it’s going to be best for him to be here (in the Territory) the next couple of years.”

National Academy head coaches Jason Stoltenberg and Brent Larkham have already invited Franklin for a training week at their respective Melbourne and Brisbane bases.

But Coburn said Territory tennis players did not have a great record after relocating interstate and the plan was to delay Franklin’s move until he was 15.

“We’d like him to stay while he is in a good training environment,” Coburn said.

“What we’re seeing is he’s catching those guys interstate and going past them rather than falling behind.”

Fellow Territory talents Michael Shepherd and Elias Krueger are now based in Melbourne training with Coburn’s former protege Ryan Palfrey.

Franklin, Politis, Leong, Kenneth Prete and Alice Springs trio Thomas van Haaren, Patrick Findlay and Tom Keelart are representing the NT at the Bruce Cup in Hobart between October 17 and 25.

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