



READY AND ABLE: Ability linker Bec Browning, Tamworth Sports Dome's Mel Finlay and ability linker Anne Davis are gearing up for the Festival of Abilities. Photo: **Gareth Gardner** 0207156GC02

Festival to make the most of it

By Erin Handley

TAMWORTH'S first-ever Festival of Abilities is set to launch tomorrow, thanks to three passionate advocates.

Wheelchair sports – basketball, tennis and rugby (or “murder ball”) – are tipped to be the highlight of tomorrow's event, with Wheelchair Sports NSW bringing a swag of extra chairs to give locals a turn.

For Ability Links organisers Bec Browning and Anne Davis, it's a chance to bring sports to Tamworth for people of all abilities and foster a sense of community.

“The whole idea of the festival is about inclusion and getting back to community roots and helping your neighbours,” Ms Browning said.

They are hoping the event will raise awareness about the possibilities for people with disabilities – rather than run-of-the-mill ten-pin bowling.

Operations manager for Tamworth Sports Dome and Aquatics, Mel Finlay is hopeful the awareness will prompt more sports to be offered to people of varying abilities in the future.

“There's nothing really in

regional areas for disability sports,” Ms Finlay said.

From humble beginnings and an expected crowd of 100, organisers are now anticipating 1000 people to attend.

Local businesses and entertainers have donated their wares and time for the event, with cupcake decorating, face painting, sensory activities for autistic children, organic gardening, graffiti, mosaic and kids' activity tables.

The festival will open at 9am at the Tamworth Sports Dome tomorrow, with activities kicking off from 10am until 3pm.