

Flyers share dream



Speed to burn . . . skating stars (from left) Bree McSweeney, Alix-Myra Anderson, Lyla Abdallah-Pinney and Marissa Earle. *Picture: TROY BENDEICH*

ONE first saw it on Playschool. One just thought it looked like fun, and for the others, speed was the drawcard.

But no matter how Marissa Earle, Bree McSweeney, Alix-Myra Anderson and Lyla Abdallah-Pinney got their start in ice speed skating, they are now a chance to become the first Australian Olympic female speed team in Vancouver in 2010.

The girls, who train at Canterbury Ice Rink, have formed a formidable combination, and are currently the top-ranked junior girls speed team in the country.

They believe their success comes from a packed training schedule — which they balance with school and



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university study — and an unrelenting close bond.

"We are all really close and have such a connection," Anderson said.

"We call it our little family and that's exactly what it's like," adds Earle, who at 14, is the youngest of the team.

It is this team-oriented focus that has allowed them to soar through the ranks of the relay events, where they are the current national record-holders.

"With relay, when you do something wrong, you feel like you have let someone down, so it's important to get it all right," Abdullah-Pinney said.

They had an opportunity to refine their skills ahead of the Junior World Championships in January, with a recent trip to Korea to train with Olympic skaters and coach Jaesu Chun.

"It was like torture," Earle said.

"It was gruelling . . . seven hours a day of intense training.

"But skating with Olympians was just amazing."

Their coach, Maggie Holland, who leads the NSW state team and has overseen the girls for the last seven

years, believes her young charges have a promising future.

"They make up a good team and that is what relay is all about," she said prior to an intensive training session last week.

"For them it's all about getting international representation in the next two years."

And while Holland may see advantages in keeping a lid on the expectations her talented foursome share, it's obvious the four skaters are dreaming big.

"We are a really strong unit, so we are definitely looking at Vancouver. It is a goal we have all set for ourselves," McSweeney said. "We all believe we can do it together."