

New generation steps up to be part of the tennis racket

Hannah Martin

DANE SWEENY is only a tad taller than the net, but Tennis Queensland already has its eye on him.

The seven-year-old's blond locks and mean backhand have earned him the nickname "Little Lleyton" and he plays against boys five years his senior.

"He's had a racquet in his hands since he was two," mum Michelle Sweeny said.

The Sunshine Coast youngster was spotted by a scout at the Kawana Tennis Club and recently played in a demonstration game on centre court during the Brisbane International.

"There are no tournaments in his age group so he's playing 10s and under and



MEASURES UP: Dane Sweeny is playing much older rivals, and (right) in action
Pictures: Jono Searle

just started 12 and under," Mrs Sweeny said. "We don't think he fully realises how good he is for such a young age and we want to keep it that way."

Despite fears that a love of tennis was

dead or dying, Dane is just one of thousands of youngsters swept up by the sport.

More than 25,000 children and teens are expected to take up the game for the first time in 2009.

Tennis Queensland hopes the comeback will unearth the game's future stars.

The success of the Brisbane International and young Queensland stars including Samantha Stosur and Bernard Tomic had inspired a new generation of fans and reignited interest in the game, Brisbane International tournament director Steve Ayles said. He said there was a 30 per cent jump in the number of registered tennis players after Australia won the Davis Cup in 1999.

