



Julie and Ben Simmons yesterday; and (below) with dad David. Pictures: WAYNE TAYLOR

'He'll always be my baby'

Basketball's hottest property on home soil

AARON LANGMAID

HER son is living the dream as one of the biggest names in American basketball, but Ben Simmons' mum, Julie, says he's still her baby.

The pair shared a candid moment on the couch yesterday as the 22-year-old came to the end of a whirlwind return trip back to where it all began.

The boy from Box Hill, who has enjoyed an astronomical rise as a point guard for the Philadelphia 76ers, proved he was still just a suburban kid at heart.

"He's just normal when he's around the family," Ms Simmons said. "He's just Ben. As it should be, right?"

"Whether he's 22 or 32, he'll always be the baby of the family. We love him very much."

Ms Simmons said the entire family — including his



Ben Simmons with Kendall Jenner. Picture: BACKGRID

five brothers and sisters — couldn't be more proud or more supportive.

In June, Simmons made history by becoming the first Australian to win the NBA Rookie of the Year award.

"It's surreal but the thing is it's just a natural fit for Ben,"

Ms Simmons said. "He's always been one of those kids who could lead."

"He has always believed he belonged in the NBA."

But his mum was coy when it came to questions of romance.

"Sorry, I can't answer that,"

she said when probed about her son's blossoming relationship with star model Kendall Jenner. "Good try though."

The grassroots game was Simmons' focus yesterday as 400 juniors gladly accepted tips from the pro at a special clinic at Wantirna's State Basketball Centre.

Young players, supported by charity group Helping Hoops, were among the participants.

"This is one of the things I've always had in my mind — to come back and give back wherever I can," Simmons said.

But he said he was still getting used to how people reacted to his star status.

"The other day, I saw somebody crying just because they saw me, which is kinda weird but at the same time it was amazing," he said.

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