Water Polo SER U16/Y96 Team Report Inter Regional Academy Girls Tournament June 18/19th 2011 – Walsall

1. Team

Gina Lay – Basingstoke ©
Cara Malone – Basingstoke
Rebekah Woolcot – Basingstoke
Esmee Ng- Basingstoke
Grace Walker – Hythe
Freya Coughlan – Hythe
Fran Collings – Mid Sussex Marlins
Matilda Coke – Mid Sussex Marlins GK
Claudia Spencer – Portsmouth
Abigail Clark – Portsmouth
Karen Chan – Worthing
Harleigh Goddard - Worthing
Lara Partridge - Crawley

2. Background

Trials were held at Basingstoke, there were 13 attendees. One other very capable (Crawley) player was unavailable for the trial, and declared herself unavailable for the Saturday of the tournament, in favour of a lower level swimming event.

Therefore I decided to take all 13 from the trial, this included the Portsmouth girls, who were relatively new to the sport, for the experience, and in the hope that they will have enjoyed, learnt and will encourage others from that large city.

We held a practice at Crowborough Vs London the week before the tournament, nine players were available, this was invaluable in determining overall strengths, weaknesses, and finding a way to play to our strengths, given the limitations in experience, team together time, physical size and playing styles/ability.

We were placed in the tougher of the two leagues of x4 in the tournament.

3. Match Performances/Stats

Saturday – 2 halves 7 mins. each way

SER 3 NER 6

The underlying issue of our limited time together, and playing an unknown quantity opposition in our first match contributed to a poor start here, the NE taking a two-goal lead.

NE was uncomfortable when our swimmer girls found space. Introducing Grace added further pressure and we recovered to finish strongly. Shame it wasn't 4 quarters.

Goals - Grace Walker (2) Karen Chan.

Majors – Rebekah Woolcot (2)

SER 3 NW(A) 14

The strongest team in the competition exploited the weaknesses we had ruthlessly. However we did enjoy a spell of play that they found uncomfortable. The last part of this game was an opportunity to get some other players in, had we kept with our top x9, 5-10 would have been a representative score.

Goals – Gina Lay, Lara Partridge, Karen Chan

Majors – Rebekah Woolcot (3), Cara Malone (1)

SER 4 West Mids 9

WM found our mobility difficult to deal with and we were strongly in this match until shortly before the break. WM were, behaviourally, our most unpleasant opponents, unfortunately the officials didn't see it that way. We were penalised with 8 majors in this match, this effectively determined the result - at least half of these were, in my opinion, not justifiable. Towards the end we put some change players in, fortunately nobody had a cold, therefore nobody got a major for sneezing on an opponent – would that have resulted in a green card for me?

Goals – Lara Partridge (2), Fran Collings (2)

Majors – Rebekah Woolcot (2), Fran Collings (2), Gina Lay, Karen Chan, Harleigh Goddard, Freya Coughlan.

Sunday – 4 Quarters of 5 Minutes

SER 4 Ireland 6

Having watched a big strong Ireland team tussle hard before succumbing to London the previous day, I felt we had a chance, if we could use our mobility against them. However the Irish did possess one of the outstanding keepers of the tournament. Early on we had the better of it as goals were traded, and the Irish were another team unsettled by our movement. At 2-2 we missed a penalty and they scored a lucky goal from a bar rebound on the counter, and then another from a quick man up against a disorganised defence, after our player was majored for an innocuous 50/50 leg tangle during a swim back. Their keeper then proceeded to make a string of decent saves that protected the lead. With time running out we found a way back from 2-5 to 4-6, but the luck of the Irish held, with the help of a superior keeper – her surname was Banks – ves really!

Goals - Gina Lay (2), Freya Coughlan, Fran Collings.

Majors – Gina Lay (2), Karen Chan, Esmee Ng, Rebekah Woolcot.

SER 14 Wales 5

Wales were the weakest team by some way. I tasked our top players with establishing a firm lead, to allow some of our developing players greater playing opportunity. After a nervous start, we took over. Fran was able to move from cover to drive and lead a charge far more modest than it would have been if we had only used our 1st nine players. Nevertheless Claudia Spencer scored a composed and memorable goal.

I estimate we would have won 22-3 had we used only our 1st 9 players. Goals – Karen Chan (3), Fran Collings (5), Gina Lay (2), Grace Walker (3), Claudia Spencer.

4. Conclusions

We went into this tournament with a squad of 13. Realistically we had 10 players capable of competing over two days at this level. However the profile of those 10 players was not one that covered all the positions.

Firstly I would commend the job Matilda Coke did in goal, which she took on voluntarily and in good heart, she has improved her loose ball collection and distribution enormously. However, Matilda's school arrangements mean that she gets little keeping tuition or practice, and she would have been a welcome addition outfield. We could have used Grace, but she was much-needed outfield. To illustrate the point, we lost our practice match to London only 7-6, using an 18yo Crawley outfield player as keeper. Luck was not on our side against Ireland, but a save or two would have tipped the balance in our favour.

Secondly, the non-availability of the Crawley right driver meant that we did not pose a threat down that side, and were unable to service surges by our right handers as well as we might. All the goals scored by Karen, Lara, Grace and Freya came from leftish positions, none when they had to play down the right.

We had two girls with higher level experience, Gina and Fran, and another physically capable of playing as hole marker - Rebekah. Therefore we needed Gina at playmaker and Fran in her natural position of midfield/cover/drive. We could have played Gina up front, but as in the recent Hants – Sussex match, she would have become isolated by the combination of a hole screen or variable quality ball in, particularly without us having a top quality right driver to supply it. Therefore we played with a mobile attack in a high maintenance way, this caused the opposition problems in the spells that we got it going. But other teams watched and learnt that we had goalkeeping frailties and that we were vulnerable to distance shots on those occasions when our covering player was not in place.

We were rarely timed out on our attacks, which testifies our speed, mobility and off the ball movement.

Within the confines above it is my view that our players over-performed and did an excellent job to effectively get near the other four mid table teams, in this respect the points total does not tell the full story, on another day, with more time, with the same group we could have finished 4th rather than 7th.

Going Forward

Leaving the age group, Gina will be a good player, deserving of good teams, Cara can join her by learning some lefty tricks, and Karen Chan emerged from being a classy swimmer who plays a bit of polo, to showing great polo potential.

This leaves us with a caucus of 5 players, built around Fran and Rebekah. Hannah Patchett who would hopefully be available next year. I am aware of two others that may emerge in Sussex. This leaves us a keeper and x3 outfield players short of a decent team.

Where will they come from? I see many potential candidates at galas, they cannot all be county champions, what can be done?

We need an RTC to drill our players out of giving away the ball cheaply against a tight defence, and how not to look like they are committing a foul - *It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it.*

Deal with all that and we might get into the top three.

Ewan Partridge – SER Team Coach