

## **Girls Water Polo under 14 (2009 & younger) Inter-Regional Championships**

### **Walsall Gala Baths 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

The South East region girls' coaches were looking forward to an exciting inter-regional tournament with the 2009 squad. The girls had participated in several warm up tournaments over the past year, including games against London and South West, and had some positive results. Nevertheless, we were not sure of the standard of the other regions as this was the first inter-regional tournament for this age group, and so it was hard to tell how the girls would fair.

The following players were selected to represent the South East region at Walsall:

- |                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Amelia Cook (G/K) | 2. Calista Almeida |
| 3. Megan Ross        | 4. Elsie Graves    |
| 5. Skye Priede       | 6. Jessica Fleming |
| 7. Luisa Borgia      | 8. Florrie Cooper  |
| 9. Molly Putt        | 10. Maia Middleton |
| 11. Aimee Fleming    | 12. Alice Ross     |

Unfortunately, Megan Ross was unable to compete at Walsall due to illness. Megan had worked very hard at the training sessions in the lead up to the competitions and is a valued member of the 2009 squad, so was greatly missed.

Eight teams had entered the competition, including Ireland and Scotland, amongst 5 other English regions. The first stage of the competition was played in two groups on the Saturday. The South East were drawn in group A with the North West, London and Scotland and the top two teams from each group were to play in the semi-finals on the Sunday. All matches were four quarters of 5 minutes actual play and each team had 5 matches across the weekend.

These are the individual match reports; -

#### **Saturday 14:00**

South East 7, London 3 (Quarter scores: 3-1, 1-0, 2-0, 1-2)

Our game got off to a good start with a lovely long shot by Skye. We tried to press London to stop them from scoring however they managed to get a lob shot past Amelia to equalise. Elsie got two goals, including one from a player-up situation to put us in a strong position after the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter. We managed to continue the momentum and, despite a few exclusions, capitalised from some counter-attacks to increase our lead to 6-1 going into the final quarter. London came back fighting in the last quarter but our strong defensive effort, including some impressive front marking in pit by Calista, and Amelia's protection of goal, meant they couldn't catch us and we came away with a solid first win.

Scorers: Skye 3, Elsie 2, Maia 1, Florrie 1

Exclusions: Elsie 2, Aimee 1

### **Saturday 17:00**

South East 13, Scotland 1 (Quarter scores: 2-0, 5-1, 0-0, 6-0)

We had seen Scotland struggle to move the ball in their game against North West earlier in the day, so planned to exploit this by pressing them across the pool and trying to steal the ball. The South East girls executed this game plan well and our high press resulted in us stealing the ball from Scotland on a number of their attacks. Our speed on the counter alongside Amelia's accurate distribution led to a 7-0 lead with just under two minutes left of the second quarter. Scotland managed to get one goal back but we were well in control of the game, and continued to counter strongly. It was a whole team effort with some of our younger players enjoying lots of game time. One particularly memorable goal in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter was orchestrated by our two 2010 girls; Maia swam down the wing and then passed the ball high across the goal to Aimee who caught it cleanly and fired it into the corner. Overall, it was a very convincing win against the weaker Scottish side.

Scorers: Elsie 4, Maia 3, Luisa 2, Florrie 2, Aimee 1, Jessica 1

Exclusions: Luisa 1, Elsie 1

### **Saturday 19:15**

South East 9, North West 5 (Quarter scores: 2-1, 3-1, 3-3, 1-0)

Going into this game, we knew it would be tougher than our previous two matches, and the winner of this would top the group. Our tactics remained largely similar to before; put a ball side press on the opposing team to make it difficult for them to pass the ball, and launch our attack from this. We had a few missed opportunities at the start of the game, where shots hit the post or went over the crossbar, but some fantastic defending from Calista stopped the ball from getting to their strong centre forward and our determined attack allowed us to break through first with a goal from Florrie. Elsie followed suit, but then a conceded a penalty, which the North West converted, keeping the score tight after the first quarter. We relaxed into the game after this and seemed much more in control, with goals from Elsie, Florrie and Luisa in the second quarter. Again, the defensive effort was pivotal for us, with all players executing the press well and covering to defend the North West counters. Ultimately this, alongside some strong shooting, enabled us to secure the win.

Scorers: Elsie 6, Florrie 2, Luisa 1

Exclusions: Jessica 1, Elsie 1, Aimee 1

As a result of the three wins, we knew we were going through to the semi-finals. We did not know who we were playing yet, as Ireland and South West were to play each other early in the morning to decide who would top the group. As we finished 1<sup>st</sup> in our group, we would have the advantage of playing the losing team!

After an enjoyable team meal, a stressful journey to the hotel courtesy of some very inconvenient roadworks, and a decent night's sleep, we found out we were playing Ireland. The Irish team had a few players who looked very strong individually so in our tactical meeting that morning, we decided to continue with our whole team press to try and prevent them from moving the ball easily.

### **Sunday 12:00**

South East 10, Ireland 2 (Quarter scores: 3-1, 4-0, 1-0, 2-1)

We started this game positively and again launched our attack off a high defensive press, with Elsie scoring a fantastic hattrick in the first quarter. The goals continued to come in the second quarter and Ireland struggled to get past our defense, which resulted in us leading 7-1 after the first half. We continued to pressure Ireland in the third quarter with some great drives by Molly opening up space in attack. Our defensive prowess continued and Ireland only managed to get one goal past Amelia in the second half, despite us giving away five player-up opportunities as a result of some slightly over zealous defending from Alice and Maia. In the end we finished with a highly convincing 10-2 victory over Ireland.

Scorers: Elsie 7, Florrie 2, Skye 1

Exclusions: Alice 3, Maia 2

As a result of this brilliant performance, we were through to the final to play North West again who had just beaten and knocked out the strong contenders from the South West. We had already beaten this team, so we knew we had the potential to win. However, having watched them play against the South West, we knew they may have different tactics up their sleeve and were prepared for a very tough final game.

### **Sunday 15:45**

South East 9, North West 1 (Quarter scores: 1-0, 0-0, 4-0, 4-1)

It was an extremely tense start to the game with both teams fighting hard for the win. Our defensive effort continued to be strong, however we were met by an equally hard press in the first half. Elsie managed to get one goal in the first quarter but a string of missed opportunities and great saves from both sides meant the first half ended 1-0 to the South East and the pressure was on! After a quick regroup in the half way break, our girls continued to pile the pressure on the North West team and broke through with goals from Elsie, Calista and Jess. Amelia made a great penalty save to keep North West off the score sheet until the last minute of the game when they exploited a rare gap in our defence. Overall, we came away with an extremely impressive 9-1 win to take the u14 inter-regional title!

Scorers: Elsie 7, Calista 1, Jessica 1

Exclusions: Elsie 2, Maia 1

As a result, the girls claimed the gold medal and maintained a fantastic winning record throughout the weekend. They will also be seeded in division 1 of the under 16 competition that should take place in 2024. This was a fantastic achievement for all the girls and the coaches were extremely proud of the effort they put into the weekend. Our win can largely be put down to a brilliant defensive effort, which enabled our attack. We only conceded 12 goals throughout the tournament which is a testament not only to a fantastic performance in goal from Amelia, but also the strong team press that all players contributed to.

The South East girls were an absolute credit to the region and demonstrated how well a team of players can come together and achieve great things. The team spirit fostered by the girls, from high fives in the warm up to endless team chants, was incredible and was a large contributor to their success. They supported each other in and out of the water and it was an absolute pleasure to coach such positive and committed players.

Alongside our overall team win, some of the girls' individual efforts were also rewarded. The South East MVP award went to Calista Almeida who took on the role of centre back at the last minute and executed it brilliantly. She made fantastic steals throughout the tournament and prevented the other teams from scoring on many occasions, proving to be an invaluable member of the team. Elsie Graves was also awarded the Player of the Tournament and Top Goal Scorer awards. Elsie scored over 25 goals across the weekend and put in a tireless effort both in attack and defense.

### **Acknowledgements**

I also want to acknowledge the commitment and support shown by the parents and supporters. The shouts from the stands could be heard throughout the game and I have no doubt that this encouraged the girls to give it their all in the pool!

Thank you to Bruce Philp in his assistant coach role who's never ending enthusiasm helped rally the girls for every game. Thank you also to Katy Ross who has been a key part of the coaching team in the lead up to the tournament and to James Ross for his guidance between the games.

Finally, a massive thank you to Becci Henderson who was an amazing team manager. Alongside her impeccable organisation throughout the weekend, she also supplied the girls with much needed Percy pigs in-between the quarters - who knows if we'd have won without this energy boost!

Lauren Hand  
9<sup>th</sup> December 2022.