

Junior Dragons/NTL Triple Header Weekend - Blog

DAY 1

On the 9th of December 2011, 5 of us South girls including Me, Hannah Jones, Katie Llewellyn, Rhian Bethell and Kate Gilderslieve arrived at Sport Wales National Centre to leave for Sussex at 4pm. We got onto our 51 seater bus with our team manager- Lyn and our umpire- Carl to make our way there. After 4 long hours of moving from seat to seat we arrived at the hotel to meet the North girls, including Leanne Thomas, Hannah Cadwallader, Ellen Zachary, Chloe McLennan, Fern Davies, and Coaches Diane and Tina. Following our arrival we headed down for our meal, and afterwards we hit the sack for an early wake up call for our first two matches. I think everyone had an early night sleep except Katie Llewellyn who decided to talk in a different language at 2 o'clock in the morning to me (thanks for that Kate haha ;)

DAY 2

After an 8:15 breakfast, Emily Holland arrived with us and we left the hotel to make our way to the venue for our first game at 11am against West Midlands. The game itself was very physical to say the least, after a shaky start, we started to play our own game as much as we could since the opposition decided to start cuddling us (no exaggeration) for the whole 60 minutes. Their heavily structured zone they put up on our attack, threw our game a little and our "clogging" in defence worked at times although wasn't consistent. We played a disciplined and well-mannered game and after having a 43-31 defeat we were very ready for the second game against Loughborough.

Following our game, we had some lunch and reflected on the previous match. In our units we then discussed how we were going to combat Loughborough Lightning. This positive de-briefing put all of us in the right mind-set for our next game and after our 20 minute warm up of stretching, sprinting, skills and drills, we were all focused on our job in hand. First quarter saw us put out a great start, everyone was working together, sticking to our game-plan of a short, sharp game which put us ahead going forward. We disrupted their game by Fern, Chloe and Kate hassling their gigantic GS throughout which shut down their options going into the circle. Unfortunately Emily Holland, who was playing centre at this point, took a heavy knock on her knee and could no longer continue in the game, although we tried not to let this affect our game-plan as a team. The short, sharp, one, twos in attack worked to our advantage and our shooters Leanne and Hannah were on fire. There was a lot less hesitation in our game and the ball seemed to move more at ease from defence through to attack when we turned the ball over. Our main target of "clogging" in their attacking third started to pay off when everyone was backing each other up, we were seeing the result. The last 4 minutes saw Loughborough call an injury time where we were only 4 goals ahead. With not long left, we knew we had to play a possession game as they were "hunting" down for a turn over. Our supporters including our bus driver (which we have now converted into a netball fan) were very vocal at this point in shouting only one word... "DEFENCEEE!"! As the clock ticked down, we kept our heads and finally won 56-57, which we were all elated with after a great team performance!

After our ice, cool down and showers we made our way back to the hotel and straight to the restaurant for our food and SECRET SANTA! We all brought our own presents which we all wrapped to put into a bag for everyone to pick one out. Our favourite wrapping paper has got to be Hannah Jones's, wrapped specially with printer paper which looked more like a bag of chips. Everyone then all piled into Hannah's room to save Emily any walking. We then all stayed in to watch the X factor final together with all 11 of us fitting on one double bed. (LITTLE MIX TO WIN!) After X factor, everyone made their way back to their rooms for a well-deserved 12 hour sleep, as we didn't have to wake up for breakfast until 10 which was blissful to say the least.

DAY 3

After a lovely, long lie in, everyone was tired but refreshed and following breakfast we packed up and were ready to leave to face Surrey Storm. Sadly, Emily had to leave us to go to the hospital before we left so after we said our goodbyes we left for the venue (GET WELL SOON EMILY).

Arriving at the venue at 12 O'clock, we had a briefing before we went to the changing rooms. As a team we discussed the positives from yesterday's win over Loughborough and decided to build on our performance in today's game. We had a thorough 20 minute warm up getting us "pumped" to challenge Surrey. We started slow in the first quarter but managed to pull it back and take the first quarter.... winning by 1 goal. They were a very fast and skilful team which we tried to shut down from the outset. Our defence had noticed their game plan from the beginning - the same high ball into the circle which we had a close down on the GS. Although we seemed to have more hesitation in our release in attack than we had in the last game yesterday which allowed Surrey to set up their defence on us quicker although this improved as we went on in the game. Again a very close, well fought game which could have gone either way in the end although unfortunately we lost 47-43, however everyone was delighted with our performance especially Di and Tina who spoilt us with our Milky-Bar tubes and chips at lunch. After we cooled down, iced and showered we had our lunch and had a de-briefing of the game and the whole weekend.

Overall it was a very eventful, enjoyable weekend as an under 19s squad which gave us great preparation for FENA in March. At the end of the day everyone said their goodbyes and we south girls got back onto our comfortable 51 seater bus whilst the north girls with Di and Tina travelled back in their ice box (lol). This weekend was a brilliant way to break up before Christmas and a great performance throughout the games over the weekend was shown. Look forward to meeting back up in January for the preparation to FENA, an awesome weekend with plenty of team bonding. Merry Christmas everyone and look forward to seeing you all in the New Year.

Bethan Dyke