

HK09, PHOENIX CUP 2009

HK09 - Mon, Feb 9

Everyone has arrived safely into Sydney and enthusiasm is in the air.

The group is bonding quickly. Kudos to Head Coach Narelle and Assistant Dean for running a great series of bonding exercises to speed up the process.

A serious afternoon of training then ensued. Lots of ground balls and flyballs. Even the pitchers did their fielding practice. Batting practice finished the afternoon session.

The evening brought our first game against the New South Wales state team. In very rainy conditions, centerfielder Shae Lillywhite led things off in the top of the first inning with a double. One batter later, Catcher Lel Anglin singled to put runners on first and third. Lillywhite scored on a wild pitch to make the score 1-0.

Jacinda Barclay started for the Hearts and threw a scoreless bottom of the first inning, striking out one and walking two while giving up no hits.

In the top of the second inning, right fielder Karissa Van Vught walked and Lillywhite singled, but both were left stranded. The bats stayed silent until Stephanie Gaynor's single with two outs in the fourth. That would prove to be the final Hearts hit in the six-inning contest that was shortened by rain. Overall on offense, the team had lots of good swings and showed patience at the plate.

On defense, the Hearts were pretty solid, committing only one recorded error on the night. Pitching was solid as well, throwing lots of strikes, though also walking six. The pitching staff also hit three batters, but wet conditions played a part.

Lexi Smith threw the 2nd and 3rd innings, giving up three hits, two walks, striking out one, and hitting one batter. She gave up one run in the 2nd.

Taylor McKay threw the fourth inning and struck out the first batter in the fifth. She gave up one hit and one walk, while allowing three runs to score. She struck out two overall.

Taylah Welch came and threw very well to finish off the fifth inning, walking the first batter and getting off the inning with a double play. In the sixth inning, she had trouble hitting spots and the NSW state team batter capitalized. In the sixth, Taylah gave up four hits, two walks, and hit one batter. Overall Taylah gave up seven runs. But actually the coaches were

pleased with her velocity and poise, so there is little concern.

Simone Wearne came on in relief, but before she could throw her first pitch, the skies opened up and the game was called an account of rain.

The final score was NSW State Team 11 and the Aussie Hearts 1. But the score is not an indicator of the night. The team played solid and the game was evenly matched until the last inning. All in all a good start for a new team against an experienced NSW squad.

The coaching staff was pleased at the focus and effort from the team. Even the pitchers did well except for one bad inning. There is a lot of young talent to build on and today's effort was pleasing for our first day together.

HK09 – Tues, Feb 10

Wet and rainy would describe the condition in Sydney today!

Special thanks to all past players who came to support the Aussie Hearts! To start the afternoon, the Hearts worked out in an indoor training facility and practiced baserunning and lots of batting.

Upon arriving at the Baulkham Hills baseball club for the evening game, rain put the event in doubt. The opportunity to face off against past Aussie Hearts player was something everyone was looking forward to.

Fortunately, the rain eventually stopped and the game began at 6:45, forty-five minutes late.

Four and a half (4.5) innings later with the score tied 0-0, not even the optic yellow baseballs from Ausport could stop the lack of light from ending the game early.

Fittingly, the Aussie Hearts past and present played to a tie.

Representing the past players were Tahlia McDonald (SBK08), Laura Eisenhower (CF05), Koby Maber (HK08), Lou Binet (all 4 previous tours), Loz McGraw (CF05), Julia Watson (HK08, SBK08), Sam Galea (HK08), Ellen Young (CF05, SBK08). To fill out numbers, members of the Baulkham Hills women's program played as well...and we suspect a couple future Aussie Hearts were also in the mix.

In the game itself, Jacinda Barclay again started on the mound for the HK09 Hearts. She threw 2.2 scoreless innings, giving up no hits, striking out one and walking one.

For the past Hearts, Tahlia McDonald was the starting pitcher. She threw two

innings, striking out one and walking one, but also giving up two hits.

In relief for the HK09 Hearts, Taylah Welch threw one third of an inning. She gave up one hit and hit a batter. Simone Wearne followed to throw two scoreless innings of her own, striking out one and giving up no hits or walks. In relief for the past Hearts, Laura Eisenhower threw two innings and gave up one hit.

All in all it was a pitchers day with only three hits for the HK09 Hearts and one hit for the past Hearts. For HK09, Shae Lillywhite had a double and single, while Taylah Welch had a single. Ellen Young had the only hit for the past players.

After the game all the Hearts players, past and present gathered together to celebrate the program. Memories were shared and sense of purpose renewed. Veteran players Julie Watson and Lou Binet reminded the current team the program is about far more than wins and losses- it is about togetherness, friendship, and fighting for each other...in other words, heart.

HK09 – Wed, Feb 11

This Aussie Hearts tour has hit the second stage.

Sydney to Taiwan. Then after a short layover, Taiwan to Hong Kong. Not much to report about our flights. Just the same old "three movies and a nap" scenario.

Though the layover in Taipei was filled with a bit of drama for Mandy as Taiwanese customs officials questioned some of her duty free purchases. But it all worked out happily in the end.

Please enjoy these photos from our Taiwan layover.

HK09 - Thu, Feb 12

MORNING UPDATE

A leisurely morning before afternoon training. Highlights since our last update include meeting our returning Japanese catcher Mihoko at the airport last night. Also, this morning at breakfast we got to see former SBK08 teammate Sam Ostrom from Canada who is playing for the North American team.

Here are a few pictures from breakfast. More info to come for this day.

AFTERNOON UPDATE

A good three-hour training session at a local field (non-tournament) was a great way to absorb more of Hong Kong. This is a city of contradictions- it is so crowded and full of hustle bustle, yet there are the tranquil views and gorgeous little spots that make you feel as if you are miles away from the city. Our training site was indeed tranquil and seemingly far away from it all.

The team went intensely about its business of throwing, fielding, and hitting practice...as well as learning the fine details of bunt defenses and first and third base situations.

But the practice was interrupted by an ambitious monkey who attempted to steal food and other items out of the players baseball bags. That certainly added a bit of excitement!

In the evening, the team went down to Victoria Harbour to eat dinner and see the famous evening light show. Last year's team viewed the show from high atop the Peak. This year's team will be down below looking up at the lights against the backdrop of the Peak.

See you tomorrow loyal readers.

HK09 - Fri, Feb 13

Hong Kong Disneyland was the anticipated destination today. The drive to Disney included breathtaking views of Hong Kong and the harbour.

Everyone had a great time. Highlights included multiple trips upon Space Mountain and a Carousel that was actually quite fun.

Umpire Mark Gooding had the photo of the day with his Mickey Mouse hands. Dean had the surprise move as he swept Narelle off her feet as they danced along Main Street USA to the tune of a fantastic Dixieland band.

Coaches and officials had a meeting tonight with tournament to begin tomorrow.

HK09 - Sat, Feb 14

FINAL UPDATE

Not the result we wanted, but a great day anyway.

The opening ceremony was fun. Shae Lillywhite was nominated to catch one of the ceremonial first pitches from Australian ambassador David Livingstone. Narelle Gosstray was honored in the ceremony. And all the teams had great fun mingling and taking pictures together.

Then the Hearts faced off against the defending tournament champs from Japan- the Far East Bloomers.

Admittedly, it is tough to write that we lost 11-1 to the Far East Bloomers. Really don't want everyone back home to see that.

But actually if you were there, it was a quite a good game up until the last two innings. The story of the day was errors. Eight errors. In contrast, the Japanese made no errors.

Early in the game great pitching and some spectacular defensive plays helped the Hearts overcome the errors. Later in the game, that was not the case. Speaking of great pitching, Jacinda Barclay again stepped up to pitch with poise. Her fastball was popping and she was throwing her off-speed pitch for strikes.

1st- The Hearts went down in order in the top of the 1st, though catcher Mihoko Ikari did blast a single. In the bottom of the inning, the Bloomers of Japan recorded two hits, a walk, and took advantage of an error. Barclays outstanding defensive effort backing up first base allowed the Hearts to turn an unusual double play. This limited the Bloomers to just one run. **End of 1st: Bloomers 1, Hearts 0**

2nd- The Hearts went down on three strikeouts to the powerful Kokubo Shino. In the bottom of the inning, a leadoff error, a fielders choice 1 to 4, then a balk put a runner in scoring position for the Bloomers. A great throw home 9 to 2 by Taylah Welch cut down the Bloomer runner and held them scoreless in the end. **End of 2nd: Bloomers 1, Hearts 0**

3rd- The Hearts stalled again with a lone walk to Shae Lillywhite. In the bottom of the inning, a leadoff single was negated by an unusual 8 to 6 fielder's choice on a rocket grounder hit to shallow centerfielder Lel Anglin. Two more fielder's choice outs at second base and the inning was over. **End of 3rd: Bloomers 1, Hearts 0**

4th- In the top of the 4th, another completely quiet inning was avoided by the at-bat of the day by third baseman Taylor McKay. Young Taylor battled

hard to foul off several two-strike pitches before smashing a line-drive single. In the bottom of the inning, Barclay continued to pitch well and play her position well. The leadoff hitter singled. Then after a groundout for the first out, another error put runners on 1st and 2nd base. But a great pickoff from Barclay to second baseman Zielke eliminated the lead runner at 2nd base and effectively ended the inning. **End of 4th: Bloomers 1, Hearts 0**

5th- Another quiet inning for the Hearts was highlighted by a leftfielder Steph Gaynor's walk. In the bottom of the inning, the wheels fell off. A leadoff double, an error, another single led to a run. A fielder's choice got the first out, then a walk loaded the bases. At this point Barclay was done and Simone Wearne came in to relieve. She got the her first batter to fly out, then another groundball error eliminated the chance to get out of the inning in good shape. This allowed an unearned run. Then a two-out single scored another unearned run. **End of 5th: Bloomers 5, Hearts 0**

6th- This was an inning that typified a night of good things in a losing effort. Lel Anglin led off with a double and Taylor McKay drove her in with another double. The ability to have an answer to the Bloomers big inning speaks volumes about the character of this team and why the day was not a total loss. In the bottom of the inning, Taylor Welch came on to pitch. She threw strikes...and hard, striking out one batter. But in the end, a couple errors and a number of hits allowed the Bloomers to score six runs and end the game by the mercy rule. To be fair, Welch's effort was actually respectable against such a strong team. **End of Game: Bloomers 11, Hearts 1**

Batters

Shae Lillywhite- BB

Mihoko Ikari- 1B, BB

Taylor McKay- 1B, 2B

Leslie Anglin- 2B

Steph Gaynor- BB

Pitchers

Jacinda Barclay- 4.1 innings, 7 hits, 2 K's, 2 walks, 2 earned runs, 5 total runs scored

Simone Wearne- 0.2 innings, 1 hit

Taylor Welch- 0.2 innings, 4 hits, 1 K, 2 walks, 5 earned runs, 6 total runs scored

ON SUNDAY, THE HEARTS MUST BEAT TAIWAN KAPOK FLOWER AT 12:30PM TO ADVANCE TO THE FINALS.

HK09 - Sun, Feb 15

Ouch.

Hearts HK09 falls to Taiwan Kapok Flower by a score of 7 to 5.

Nobody dreams of going away on a baseball tour and missing the finals. But that is what has happened for the first time in Aussie Hearts history.

Actually, the Hearts didn't play that badly, making only a few mistakes and hitting the ball well. And pitchers did throw strikes. But simply Taiwan played better. Taiwan made some great catches of screaming line drives in the outfield. They got hits in some important situations. So we tip our hats to our Taiwanese opponents and look forward to the next game.

We still get to play baseball one more time and that is what it is all about. And while it might sound cliché to say that our baseball tours are about more than winning and losing...well please be sure to note that we always say that when we win too.

Overall, this group embodies the ethic of the Aussie Hearts by the way it works hard, does what it is asked to do, and gets along like a dozen good friends...even though many players only met less than a week ago. This team is all for one and one for all...they are every bit Aussie Hearts.

And they have a bit of talent...but we simply haven't put a win together yet. We have one more chance to win tomorrow.

Here is today's report

1st inning: Three singles and a walk by starting pitcher Lexi Smith led to one run for Taiwan. A 1st and 3rd base stealing defense netted a nifty first out. A strikeout by Lexi ended the inning. The Hearts answered by scoring four in the first on walks by shortstop Shae Lillywhite and centerfielder Lel Anglin. First baseman Taylor McKay doubled and third baseman Jenn Zielke singled. Left-fielder Karissa Van Vught also walked. **End of 1st: Hearts 4, Kapok Flower 1**

2nd inning: Pitcher Lexi Smith gave up a walk, double, and a single. But a good pickoff move by Lexi got the first out and then catcher Mihoko caught a runner stealing to effectively eliminate the Taiwanese threat. In the bottom of the inning, the Hearts were a bit unlucky. Right fielder Steph Gaynor was hit by a pitch and Mihoko walked before Lel Anglin hit a deep drive to right field that was caught with a great effort. **End of 2nd: Hearts 4, Kapok Flower 1**

3rd inning: The Kapok Flower team batted through the order. A one-out walk, then a two-out single put runners on 1st and 2nd base. Then Taiwan loaded the bases on an error. Subsequently a hit batter brought in one run,

then a double cleared the bases. The Hearts led off the bottom of the inning with a blazing line drive to centerfield by Taylor McKay, but the centerfielder made a great catch. No luck for the Hearts. **End of 3rd: Kapok Flower 5, Hearts 4**

4th inning: A single and a double for Taiwan put runners on 1st and 3rd. Simone Wearne came on in relief with one out. She proceeded to get her first hitter to an 0-2 count before missing with a waste pitch that was crushed for a 2-run double. She got the next two hitters to ground out and strike out. In the bottom of the inning, the Hearts indeed went quietly, striking out twice. **End of 4th: Kapok Flower 7, Hearts 4**

5th inning: In the 5th, Wearne quickly retired the Taiwanese 1-2-3 with two strikeouts and a weak pop-up. In the bottom of the inning with one-out, Mihoko Ikari bunted and reached on an error. She later scored on Taylor McKay's deep pop-up that was muffed by the right-fielder. Jenn Zielke then hit a two-out laser-beam line drive over the centerfielder's head that was caught in an amazing backward leap. **End of 5th: Kapok Flower 7: Hearts 5**

6th inning: Wearne gave up two singles and struck out two. No runs allowed. But in the bottom of the inning, the Hearts could not manage any more runs. **Final Score: Kapok Flower 7, Hearts 5**

Batters

Shae Lillywhite: BB

Mihoko Ikari: BB

Lel Anglin: BB

Taylor McKay: 2B, RBI

Jenn Zielke: 1B, RBI

Simone Wearne: BB

Karissa Van Vught: BB

Steph Gaynor: HBP

Pitching

Lexi Smith: 3.1 innings, 11 hits, 1 K, 3 walks, 1 HBP, 3 earned runs, 7 runs scored

Simone Wearne: 2.2 innings, 3 hits, 5 K's, 0 earned runs, 0 runs scored

Currently the Hearts sit with two losses in the tournament. Their final contest will be a consolation game that will likely be played Hong Kong in the morning.

Despite the setback of elimination from finals, the team is still a tight group and is pleased to be able to play one more game together and to hopefully get a win on the board.

HK09 - Mon, Feb 16

The HK09 Hearts get on board with win today over the Hong Kong Allies by a score of 10-4. To some observers, playing for fifth place at a tournament may not mean much. But it can.

And for this edition of the Aussie Hearts, today says something.

What it says is that even when things are not going their way, this group has the pride and commitment to keep fighting...and to keep backing each other. In a short time this group has become friends who have stuck together through thick and thin.

Indeed, Australian ambassador David Livingstone remarked on the togetherness and fighting spirit of the team when watching the game yesterday. Today was a testimony to a team that has embodied the Aussie Hearts spirit in that regard.

Flowery words, maybe. But these qualities of commitment and togetherness are rarer than they you might think, especially in shorter-term relationships such as a tour. Losses and poor batting averages can often spoil a group dynamic. But not here and that is a credit to the members of this HK09 tour.

Today's report:

1st inning- The Hearts jumped on the board with four runs in the top of the 1st inning. Catcher Mihoko Ikari singled and centerfielder Lel Anglin walked. They were driven in by pitcher Taylor McKay's double. Subsequently McKay was driven in by third baseman Jenn Zielke's triple. Second baseman Jacinda Barclay singled in Zielke. Leftfielder Mandy Harris also had a hit that drove in Barclay. In the bottom of the inning, pitcher McKay gave up two walks, a sacrifice bunt, and a sacrifice fly which allowed Hong Kong one run on no hits. **End of 1st: Hearts 5, Hong Kong Allies 1**

2nd inning: To lead off the second, shortstop Shae Lillywhite singles, stole two bases and scored on Taylor McKay's groundout to short. Lel Anglin walked and scored on Jenn Zielke's double. In the bottom of the inning, pitcher McKay walked one and struck out one. She faced the minimum three

batters because catcher Mihoko Ikari gunned out the runner trying to steal **End of 2nd: Hearts 7, Hong Kong Allies 1**

3rd inning: The Hearts went quietly in the third with only Lexi Smith reaching. In the bottom of the inning, McKay mowed down the HK Allies 1-2-3. **End of 3rd: Hearts 7, Hong Kong Allies 2**

4th inning: Lel Anglin singled with one out, stole second, and was driven in by Taylor McKay's second double. Jenn Zielke also walked and stole a base. In the bottom of the inning, Hong Kong scored two runs on an error, a walk, a double, and a single against McKay. Taylah Welch came on to pitch with two outs to close out the inning. **End of 4th: Hearts 8, Hong Kong Allies 3**

5th inning: New leftfielder Steph Gaynor led off with a walk and new pitcher Taylor Welch was hit by a pitch. They both scored on singles by Ikari and Anglin. In the bottom of the inning, pitcher Welch gave up two walks and got two outs before Jacinda Barclay came in to relieve. She gave up a single that allowed a run (charged to Welch) before striking out the last batter. **End of 5th: Heart 10, Hong Kong Allies 4**

6th inning: The Hearts went down 1-2-3 in order. In the bottom half, Barclay walked the first batter before getting the next two batter to fly out and strike out. Young Barclay completed her final Hearts appearance as a junior by picking off the runner from 2nd base to end the game. **Final Score: Hearts 10, Hong Kong Allies 4**

Batters

Shae Lillywhite: 1B

Mihoko Ikari: 1B, 1B

Lel Anglin: BB, BB, 1B, 1B

Taylor McKay: 2B, 2B

Jenn Zielke: 3B, 2B, BB

Jacinda Barclay: 1B

Mandy Harris: 1B

Steph Gaynor: BB

Taylor Welch: HBP

Pitchers

Taylor McKay: 3.2 innings, 2 hits, 1 K, 4 walks, 2 earned runs, 3 runs scored

Taylah Welch: 1 inning, 0 hits, 1 K, 4 walks, 1 earned run, 1 run scored

Jacinda Barclay 1.1 innings, 1 hit, 2 K's, no runs scored

HK09 - Tue, Feb 17

Umpires Mark Gooding and Janine Thompson did an excellent job umpiring the Grand Final.

Japan Far East Bloomers beat North American Liberty Belles 10-0 to win the title for the 2nd straight year.

In the 3rd place game, Taiwan Kapok Flower beat Korea TOP 12-8 in 8 innings.

Taylor McKay was named Aussie Hearts MVP and best overall hitter at the tournament.

The closing banquet was fun, as was Jacinda's 18th birthday celebration that was officiated by the ambassador from the Australian Consulate. We sightsee on Wednesday before flying home.

More updates during the week after we arrive home.