

HK08 – Phoenix Cup

AUSSIE HEARTS FINISH IN 3RD PLACE

JULIA WATSON NAMED TOP HITTER IN TOURNAMENT

Tour Diary

HK08 - Sat, Feb 9

Can you say rain? A familiar story repeats itself in this part of the world as training camp kicks off for HK08 in Sydney. An indoor cricket center in Blacktown provided a respite from the showers and an opportunity to begin the camp.

First apparel was handed out and organisational details handled. After every piece of apparel was deemed to fit just right, then the official team photo was taken.

Then, Coaches Narelle and Kelly put the newest Aussie Hearts to the test. "This group can throw...and catch. I like our chances," said coach Narelle with an impish grin. Too early to tell how good this team really is through an indoor workout, but not too soon to see that these girls have "heart".

After all the pitcher did bullpens, hitters took batting practice, and fielders worked on ground ball technique, the afternoon finished with a fun wiffle ball game.

Lou B. was named the first Ausport-Jeneane Lesko Hustle Award winner for her continuing leadership and high enthusiasm.

Fingers crossed, a sunny day lies ahead tomorrow for our friendly showdown with the Aussie Hearts alumni.

HK08 - Sun, Feb 10

And the clouds parted and the sun shone through!

After a good morning workout at an indoor training facility, we were blessed with a sunny field to play our two warm-up games against the Aussie Hearts past players.

The indoor morning session was highlighted by guest coach Simone Wearne who had flown in the night before from Melbourne. An All-World pitcher and recently named "Women's Player of the Year" by the Australian Baseball Federation, Simone is a longtime Aussie Hearts coach. She worked with the pitching staff on a number of topics, including their pickoff moves.

In the afternoon, the HK08 Hearts faced off against past players from the 2005 and 2006 California-Florida tours. Special thanks Cass Donald, Miranda Scott, Louisa Scott, Loz McGraw, Jade Cantori, Ellen Young, and Laura Neads for supporting the newest team.

In the opening game, the past players jumped out to a 4-0 lead against a strong performance by three-time Heart Eryn Shipp. Back from a stint in America, past player Ellen Young had a strong scoreless outing for the alumni. Though the HK08 team jumped back against Louisa Scott and the past players to score four runs in the next to last inning on a grand slam by Jacinda Barclay. Barclay had also tripled earlier in the game. Ultimately, the past players came back to prevail in a thriller by a score of 5-4.

In the second game, two-time Heart Jacinda Barclay squared off on the mound for HK08 versus Cass Donald for the past players. The past players jumped out to a 2-0 lead on Jacinda and the HK08 squad. But a sensational 2nd inning saw the HK08 team jump to an 8-2 lead, one that they never relinquished.

Highlights in the big 2nd inning included doubles by Julia Watson and Holly Hafner, and a sensational bunt by Pippa Johnston. Nerida Quinnell also had a single and a double for HK08 in the game. Miranda Scott had two hits for the past players. The final score was 11-3 in favor of the HK08 squad, leaving them in good stead to begin their journey to Hong Kong tomorrow.

Special thanks to the North Ryde Baseball Club, North Ryde RSL, and Angela Hafner for use of the facility. Having these warm-up games were crucial to our team's preparation for this tournament. Thanks for coming through when absolutely no other field was available during this monsoon period in Sydney!

Winners of the Ausport-Jeneane Lesko Hustle Award were "Mad" Mandy Harris in the morning workout, Jacinca Barclay in the first game, and Julia Watson with Pippa Johnston in the second game.

Stay tuned for our reports from Hong Kong!

HK08 - Mon, Feb 11

After a late night packing and the long goodbyes at the airport, the Aussie Hearts were bound for Hong Kong.

It was a quiet flight spend dozing in front of the in-flight entertainment system. The highlight was the captain wishing our team good luck over the intercom and the stewardess presenting us a bottle of French champagne to take with us to celebrate our journey.

Hong Kong airport provided a scare as a few players were told they did not have the proper visa to enter Hong Kong. Luckily, cooler heads prevailed as the immigration officers came to understand that we were not professional athletes, despite our glamorous appearance :-)

All in all, good to be in a flat bed to have a good sleep. Our first training session is tomorrow morning. Stay tuned.

Eryn Shipp was the Ausport-Jeneane Lesko Hustle Award winner for her full-on assistance to everyone with their bags.

HK08 - Tues, Feb 12

The morning began chilly, the Hearts were quickly warmed by the beautiful Sai Tso Wan Baseball Field- Hong Kong's premier baseball facility. A three-hour morning practice session was productive and fun, as well as sunny by the end.

Topics included a good stretch, throwing, bunting, rundown plays, bunt coverages, pitcher's fielding practice. Also the infielders took groundballs and the outfielders took flyballs. Pitchers all threw bullpens and each hitter took live batting practice on the beautiful field. We can't wait for the games to start on Thursday.

In the afternoon, the Hearts took the subway to Hong Kong Island where they boarded the historic peak tram and rode high into the massive hills above Hong Kong. The view was fantastic as the sun set and the lights came on in the city. The team lingered over this billion-dollar view while eating dinner at the Bubba Gump restaurant.

The highlight on the way home was a fantastic open-top, double decker bus. Citizens on the streets of Hong Kong Island were treated to a rousing rendition of "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie." Afterwards, the local folk engaged the team with smiles and photos all around while riding atop the double-decker bus on a chilly night.

Max Costello and Sharon Smith were the winners of the Ausport-Jeneane Lesko Hustle Award. Disneyland awaits tomorrow.

HK08 - Wed, Feb 13

What a day! The anticipation for Disneyworld was palpable. While this was the Aussie Hearts third Disney visit (twice previously in Florida), for most of this year's team it was their first time.

After a wonderful time taking photos and making new friends on the way into the park, Space Mountain was the first destination for many of the Hearts. Shortly thereafter, the women decided to kick it around for a few photos with Buzz Lightyear- a fun time was had by all. After that, the team scattered to ride many attractions and see many shows.

Overall, a very good day for the team. Hopefully, all team members took a moment to wish upon a star as the Oregon Phoenix Cup begins tomorrow.

The Aussie Hearts open the tournament with a 8:30am game against the Sunrise Baseball Club from Seoul, Korea. Then the opening ceremony will follow where Nerida Quinnell will represent the Hearts by catching the first pitch from a local dignitary.

HK08 - Thu, Feb 14

5:00am wake up call

Breakfast at 6:00am

Leave on the bus at 6:30am, its pitch black outside.

We arrived at the field at 7:00am. Starting pitcher Eryn Shipp led the charge to dugout and began to hang the Australian flag. The Hearts took batting practice in the nets as the sun slowly rose.

After a sharp infield/outfield warm-up, the Aussie Hearts were ready come game time at 8:30am against Korea Sunrise.

Batting first as the visitors, the Hearts were led by Kelly Manzie-Novotny who smashed a groundball up the middle that was too hot for the shortstop to handle. Kelly stole second and later scored the Hearts first run on a sacrifice fly by first-basemen Lou Binet. All up, the Hearts scored six runs in the first.

Korea Sunrise answered with three runs in the first. Shipp walked the first two batters and gave up three hits.

Shipp found herself over the next four innings, giving up only three more runs and three more hits, as well as only one more walk. She also struck out four batters for over her five innings as she got the win (1-0).

In relief, Jacinda Barclay threw one inning and faced the minimum of three batters, striking out one.

The game was called after the sixth inning due to the ten-run rule. The Hearts scored six in the first, one in the second inning, five in the third, and four in the sixth inning.

The final score was 16-6 in favor of the Hearts. Kelly Manzie-Novotny had three hits and a walk, reaching base a total of five times and scoring three runs. Holly Hafner also had two hits and scored two runs.

Acting Consul-General from the Australian Consulate in Hong Kong was on hand to support the team and throw out a ceremonial pitch in the opening ceremony. Not only did he throw a perfect strike to catcher Nerida Quinell, the pair also had a chance to compare notes about their baseball days in Canberra, ACT. Mr. Livingstone used to play for Woden, while Nerida plays for the Bandits.

Thank you for Mr. Livingstone, you are a class act!

Tomorrow the Hearts face off against hometown Hong Kong in the final game of the preliminary round.

HK08 - Fri, Feb 15

After a 5:00am wakeup yesterday and a late-night sightseeing excursion, the Hearts valued a sleep-in and an afternoon game against the Hong Kong team.

To set the scene: the Aussie Hearts and Hong Kong were both tied with one win each and both teams were assured a birth in Saturday's semi-finals. At stake today was a first place seed in the pool and perhaps an easier route to the grand final Sunday. Strategy for the Hearts involved trying different lineup combinations in order to be best prepared for Saturday's semi-final.

Starting pitcher Holly Hafner began the first inning well, giving up one hit and one unearned run. In the second, she gave up a walk and an unearned run. In the defensive third, the wheels fell off for the Hearts a bit as they gave up three unearned runs on one hit.

On offense the Hearts sent up only ten batters through the first three innings- the only hit an infield single by Jacinda Barclay.

Through three innings, the score was 5-0.

In the top of the 4th inning, Hong Kong began to hit young Hafner. The locals drove three hits and plated three runs (two earned). This was the only point in the game where Hafner struggled, but she came back to closeout the inning. At this point the score was 8-0.

In the bottom of the 4th, the Aussie Hearts offense came alive. Kelly Manzie-Novotny (shortstop) came off the bench to drive a single, steal two bases, and score the team's first run on Jacinda Barclay's groundout to short. Next Lou Binet drove a triple, but was left stranded at third base.

Head coach Narelle Gosstray then took the mound for the Hearts in the top of the 5th. She gave up two unearned runs on a hit and a walk. Both runs scored with two outs and a single up the middle over second base that just missed the glove of the diving shortstop.

Through the final two innings of the game, Gosstray kept the door shut as she allowed only two more hits and no more runs. A highlight was a pickup of a Hong Kong runner at second base which Gosstray orchestrated with the shortstop in the 6th inning.

Trailing 10-1 in the bottom of the 6th, Lou Binet led off with a double. She later advanced to third on a hard Koby Maber groundball to 2B and scored on a clutch single by Katie Gosch with two outs.

Trailing 10-2 in the bottom of the 7th and final inning, a special pep talk was at hand. Acting Consul-General David Livingstone from the Australian Consulate in Hong Kong had taken time out of his busy schedule to again support the team. A former baseballer himself, Mr. Livingstone spoke to the girls in the huddle before the final offensive inning. He reminded them about how it was in the Australian character to give it a go and fight for every base until the very last out.

The team responded. Kelly Manzie-Novotny led off with a red hot liner that the leftfielder couldn't handle. She scored on a Narelle Gosstray double, making the score 10-3. Then an ailing Koby Maber smashed a long single to push across Gosstray and the Hearts fourth and final run.

Not a winner in the end, but certainly a very Australian red-hot go. The final score was 10-4 in favor of Hong Kong. Losing pitcher Holly Hafner (0-1) gave up five hits and one earned run over four innings. She walked two and struck out three. The leading hitter were Lou Binet who had a triple and a double.

Finishing 2nd in their pool, the Hearts will play their semi-final at 3:30pm tomorrow against the highly-touted Far East Bloomers from Japan who are the number one seed from the other pool. Hong Kong will face the North American North Stars at Noon in the other semi.

HK08 - Sat, Feb 16

Some things are not always meant to be, and that was the case today for the Aussie Hearts HK08 team who fell 6-2 to the Far East Bloomers from Japan.

The Hearts went down quietly in the top of the first inning. Then young Jacinda Barclay from Western Australia took the mound for the Aussies. She walked the first batter and then promptly picked the runner off with a move she had honed with Coach Simone Wearne in training camp a week earlier. The next batter singled and attempted to steal. Catcher Kelly Manzie-Novotny gunned her down and the Japanese never tried to steal on her again. Soon the Aussies were out of the inning.

The Hearts left two runners stranded in the top of the 2nd. In the bottom of the inning, the Japanese sent nine batters to the plate. After a walk with one out, a line drive up the middle just squirted out of Barclay's glove, dashing hopes of an easy double play that would have ended the inning. Next a hit, an error by the shortstop, and a walk left the bases loaded with the Far East Bloomers now up by two runs. After retiring a second out, the next batter doubled to drive in three further runs, putting the Japanese up 5-0.

The Hearts came back strong in the top of the third. Kelly Manzie-Novotny led off with a double, stole third base, and was driven in by a Julie Watson single. Watson advanced on a Holly Hafner single and scored on Nerida Quinnell's infield groundout. This pulled the Hearts within 5-2. In the bottom of the third inning, the Far East Bloomers scored their first earned run with three hits. This made the score 6-2.

The Aussies went down quietly in the top of the fourth. After a walk and single to start the bottom of the inning, Barclay was dragged in favor of Narelle Gosstray who promptly got the inning's final two outs. Barclay's tally was 3.1 innings, runs, 1 earned run, 7 hits, and 4 walks. She threw 74 pitches- 37 balls and 37 strikes. While not her best performance, Barclay proved gutsy and poised against perhaps the strongest opposition she has ever faced. She never lost her cool and made adjustments that allowed her to keep battling. All in all, an important and productive step for a young women with dreams of playing for the Australian national team someday.

In the top of the fifth inning, the Aussies threatened by loading the bases with two outs on a Nerida Quinnell walk and Mandy Harris single, though they did not score. In the bottom of the fifth Gosstray faced four batters, giving up a hit and striking out one.

In the top of the sixth, the Aussies mounted a rally with an error and two hits. But baserunning mistakes cost two outs and spoiled the team's best chance to get back into the ballgame. The Japanese went quietly in there half of the sixth, Gosstray giving up one walk and striking out one. Her totals were as follows: 2.2 innings, no runs, 2 strikeouts, and one walk. This followed three strong emergency innings yesterday.

In the top of the seventh innings, the Hearts battled with some strong at-bats by Lou Binet, Eryn Shipp, and Nerida Quinnell, but were not able to secure any more runs.

Final score- Far East Bloomers of Japan 6, Aussie Hearts 2.

Offensive highlights included two hits each by Kelly Manzie-Novotny and Julia Watson. The Hearts will face Hong Kong in the 3rd place game tomorrow morning at 8:30am.

(We apologize, this game report was originally filed 10 hours ago, but was somehow lost in the ether.)

HK08 – Sun, Feb 17

Another 5.00am wakeup call. And Eryn Shipp takes the mound again. Third place is at stake.

A coin flip made the Aussie Hearts the home team in a rematch of Friday's final pool game against Hong Kong. Shipp gave up one hit and one unearned run in the top of the first. In the bottom of the inning, a Kelly Manzie-Novotny walk, a Julia Watson hit and a Nerida Quinnell hit yielded two runs for the Aussies.

In the top of the second inning, Shipp sent Hong Kong down with no hits, no walks, and no runs. In the bottom of the second, the Hearts scored four unearned runs, highlighted by hits from Max Costello and Koby Maber, as well as a memorable walk to Jacinda Barclay. Through two innings, the Hearts led 6-1.

In the top of the third inning, Hong Kong scored five runs on three hits and two walks. Three runs were earned, two were unearned. This tied the score at 6-6. The inning was highlighted by a diving catch of a line drive at shortstop by Jacinda Barclay.

In the bottom of the third, the Hearts pumped Hong Kong for six runs to answer back. Four straight smashes by Sam Galea, Koby Maber, Kelly Manzie-Novotny, and Julia Watson scored one run and loaded the bases. Then Jacinda 'Big Bark' Barclay smashed a bases-clearing triple. She later scored on a passed ball to make the score 12-6 in favour of the Hearts.

In the top of the fourth, Shipp sent the Hong Kong team down quietly, allowing one hit. In the bottom of the fourth, Kelly Manzie-Novotny and Julia Watson both singled and scored to make it 14-6 to the Hearts.

In the top of the fifth inning, Holly Hafner came on to pitch. The final line on Shipp – 4 innings, 6 runs, 3 earned runs, five hits and three walks.

Hafner shut down Hong Kong in the fifth, while the Hearts also went down quietly in the bottom of the inning.

In the top of the 6th, Hafner gave up a single and double, yielding two runs, though only one was earned. Young Hafner showed a lot of poise as she pitched out of an inning made difficult by two fielding errors. In the middle of the sixth, the score was 14-8.

In the bottom of the sixth, the Hearts attacked again scoring four runs to close out the game and force an early finish by the ten-run rule. The effort was highlighted by Julia Watson's fourth hit of the game and a Jacinda Barclay double.

Final score – Aussie Hearts 18, Hong Kong 8

It was a bittersweet finish as it was the last time this group will play together. Though the game was very special because so many different players had a go and contributed to the effort.

Special mention must be made of the Aussie Hearts #1 fan in Hong Kong. Acting Consul-General David Livingstone attended his third game in four days. He even bought a bottle of Australian bubbly to present to the team to congratulate their 3rd place finish. The team was very deeply touched to have their country's highest official in Hong Kong take the time to offer such genuine and friendly support.

The Hearts will attend the closing ceremony this evening as part of the Hong Kong Baseball Association's 15th Anniversary banquet. Tomorrow will see a cultural daytrip before boarding the plane home at night.

This may be the last entry from Hong Kong. Thanks to all who are reading, as well as those emailing support.