

## VAN DIEMENS VOLLEYBALL CLUB – GOOD NEIGHBOUR REPORT

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2013 the Van Diemens Volleyball Club – Division 1 Women's team travelled to Canberra to compete in the 48<sup>th</sup> Good Neighbour Volleyball Tournament, held over the weekend of the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2013.

Women's Division 1: Coach – Chris Rice

- Laura Coombe
- Kaitlyn Palfrey
- Thelma Vaughan
- Jayne McPherson
- Erica Rice (Captain)
- Kylie Midson
- Sandra Rice

Good Neighbour is one of the longest-running and most prestigious volleyball competitions in Australia and saw in excess of 120 club teams from across most states and territories, as well as elite teams from the National Program competing. Teams competed in 13 divisions, 6 men's divisions, 5 women's divisions and 2 recreational divisions. Matches were held at three venues, the AIS, National Netball Centre and ANU.

In preparation for Good Neighbour the team trained every Sunday for 5 months leading into the tournament. In addition they competed together in the Tasmanian Spring Southern League. Using this local competition as match practice the team remained undefeated, only dropping one set, before their departure. As a result, Good Neighbour gave the team an excellent opportunity to compete against interstate teams of similar standard whilst working on several aspects of their game, which are unachievable in Tasmania.

In particular, the team was able to work on strategies centred around blocking/defending quick attacks, as the majority of the opposition teams relied on this form of attack heavily. Without experiencing this type of offence in Tasmania the team struggled to defend against the multitude of quick attacks that the other teams were prepared to run. The variety in height, length and speed of the forward quicks, whilst utilising the slide and quick behind and at times running a double/tandem quick attack made life difficult for our middle blockers and in turn our back court defenders.

Playing at this level also enabled the team to gauge their rate of progress over the past couple of years, having played in the same division at this particular tournament in 2010 and similar divisions at Warrnambool in 2011 and 2012.

### **Tournament Format:**

The division 1 women's competition saw 15 teams entered, across 2 pools. A preliminary round robin was conducted in each pool, with the highest two ranked teams progressing to crossover semi finals. Team position was determined by competition points, followed by set ratio and then point ratio.

All preliminary round robin matches were best of 5 sets or to the time limit, whichever came first. Teams were allocated 60mins of court time, comprising of 10 minutes warm up and 50mins of match time.

Interestingly enough there were only 4 teams in Women's Honours in 2013, whilst there were only 6 teams in women's division 1 in 2012. I suspect for whatever reason the large increase in teams in the women's division 1 competition was directly related to the decrease in women's honours teams in 2013 and subsequently the division 1 being a stronger competition in 2013.

## Results:

Match 1: VDVC **drew** Sydney North Volleyball (NSW) 1:1 (55:45) 23-25, 25-18, 7-2

**Set 1** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Jayne, and Laura

- A reasonable start for the VD's against a small but skilful side. Three kills to Erica gave the VD's a 4-1 lead early on. However three service errors and two hitting errors saw the VD's call a time out trailing 6-9.
- A number of service reception errors and blocking errors by the VD's saw SNV extend their lead 9-14. Before a service run by Thelma assisted by some strong blocking by Erica narrowed the score line 13-15.
- Another 3 service errors on the back of problems in service reception saw SNV pull away once again leading 16-22.
- Two kill blocks to Kaitlyn and two kills to Sandra late in the set got the VD's back to 21-22, but a blocking error, another serving error and a ball handling error on set point saw SNV close it out 23-25.

**Set 2** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Kylie, and Laura

- A strong start with two overpass kills to Erica and an ace to Sandra saw the VD's with an early lead, however this was quickly regained by SNV after 3 hitting errors by the VD's reducing the margin to 7-6.
- Two kills by Kaitlyn, which she followed up with an ace, saw the VD's jump out to a 13-9 lead.
- The team maintained their lead 16-12 with some excellent defence and transition kills but failed to extend their advantage with 2 service errors and 2 hitting errors.
- From here strong serving by Laura and some big hitting by Kaitlyn saw the VD's run away with the second set 25-18.

**Set 3** – Line Up: Jayne, Thelma, Erica (c), Kylie, Laura, Kaitlyn, and Sandra (L)

- The VD's controlled the tempo of the third set, but time was against them with only 6 minutes remaining on the clock.
- Two kill blocks to Erica and two aces to Thelma saw the team ahead 7-2 before time was called.

**Match comments:** As is always the case, it was difficult for the team to settle into play early in their first match. Playing at a higher standard of competition than they are use to, whilst dealing with nerves and a change in playing conditions proved to be costly in the first set. Once they adjusted and started to relax and play their own game they won the second set comfortably. Ultimately it would be the time restriction on the match that would be their undoing, as they were unable to complete the third set or to pass the 13 points required to force a result, rather than finishing with a draw.

**Set 1** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Kylie, and Laura

- Another slow start by the VD's with a defensive error followed by a service reception error saw them trail 0-3. However an ace to Thelma followed by kills to Sandra, Kaitlyn, Erica and Laura saw the VD's team lead 7-5.
- A poor patch in service reception and 3 service errors forced the VD's to take a time out trailing 13-15.
- Excellent defence by the Titans mounted the pressure on the VD's attack and as a result another 3 hitting errors were made before a timeout was called trailing 14-19 in the first set.
- A kill to Kaitlyn followed by a kill block to Thelma saw the team get back to 17-20 before a spate of errors allowed the Titans to run away with the first set 20-25.

**Set 2** – Line Up: Kylie, Thelma, Erica (c), Jayne, Laura, Kaitlyn, and Sandra (L)

- A change to the line-up was made at the beginning of the second set to try and strengthen the VD's attack and service reception. It proved useful right off the bat with the VD's getting away to an early lead 8-4 with some big hitting from Erica and Kaitlyn from the outside.
- The VD's continued to win points with the rallies getting shorter. A kill from Thelma from an overpass and a kill from Jayne helped the VD's move ahead further 14-7.
- A good run of points by the VD's with excellent plays from Laura, Kylie and strong defence from Sandra saw the second set closed out 25-16.

**Set 3** – Line Up: Kylie, Thelma, Erica (c), Jayne, Laura, Kaitlyn, and Sandra (L)

- Building on the momentum in the second set the VD's got away to an early lead 5-2 in the third set.
- The Titans stepped up yet again and despite strong resistance from the VD's levelled at 9-9 through some strong middle attacking.
- With less than 5 minutes remaining it was now up to the teams to finish off the match, with the coaches left without any significant influence on the match by way of timeout or substitutions.
- Three kills to Erica in as many points saw the VD's move within one point of holding a commanding position to win the match 12-9.
- The next four points went on serve 14-11 to the VD's before a serving error and a ball handling error by the VD's closed the gap 14-13.
- With only seconds remaining a kill block to the VD's extended their lead 15-13 however a rare lapse in concentration on the next point saw a free ball set waywardly and land on the court between two players and the siren sounded 15-14.

**Match comments:** The Titans were a tall blocking team and excellent defenders in the backcourt. Our service reception was limiting the effectiveness of our middle attack, whilst the Titans blocking pressure on our outside hitters rendered them ineffective initially. This was the first time we had played against a tall blocking team that blocked line and defended cross-court heavily. Adjustments to the line up improved service reception whilst our attack from the outside was strengthened; this clearly changed the game in our favour. Unfortunately the pressure of the competition got to our team late in the match with a number of uncharacteristic mistakes by our more experienced players costing the team outright victory in the dying minutes.

**Set 1** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Kylie, and Laura

- The VD's produced a rather lack lustre start to their match against UNSW, possibly due to playing and performing duty for the two preceding matches respectively.
- At the start of the match UNSW transitioned twice and blocked twice to lead 4-8, while two of the VD's points came from UNSW hitting errors.
- Despite a transition point through Kaitlyn, UNSW increased their lead to 9-16, with two more blocks and another kill.
- The VD's produced a small fight back late in the set with a block to Erica and then an ace to Laura, but UNSW blocked again and then the VD's made a mistake in service reception to concede the first set 18-25.

**Set 2** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Jayne, and Laura

- After losing the first set the VD's responded with an ace from Thelma and a kill from Jayne to start the second set and stay with UNSW 8-8.
- Nevertheless the VD's were finding it difficult to terminate the ball because of the opposition's excellent defence. UNSW counter attack was far too efficient as they turned defence into attack with ease, pushing ahead 11-19
- UNSW pulled away and won the second set 16-25 with strong resistance from the VD's although the score line didn't reflect the efforts or the quality of the play.

**Set 3** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Jayne, and Laura

- With victory already guaranteed UNSW started the third set with two of their junior players on court.
- UNSW called a time out trailing 8-6 having to work hard for their points as the VD's dug in and refused to give in. A second timeout was called immediately after their first by UNSW and now less than 5 minutes remained on the clock, which excluded any further timeouts or substitutions to be made.
- By now the VD's had become accustomed to the speed of their opponents' attack and the weakened UNSW line-up found it hard to keep up winning only 3 more points as the VD's raced to a 14-9 lead when the final siren sounded on the back of 3 kill blocks to Jayne.

**Match comments:** UNSW were clearly the strongest team we had seen play during the first day's competition. Whilst we remained competitive with them, their attack was far superior to ours and highlighted our deficiencies in defence. Their attack was lead by their setter who controlled the tempo of the game in amazing fashion and was supported by a slew of International Students who were amazingly athletic and powerful in attack. This was clearly the type of opposition we had come to play and gave us a considerable amount of things to take away from the match and to work on for future competition at this level.

**Set 1** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Jayne, and Laura

- After a difficult first day the VD's responded well early, starting with a kill block to Thelma and another to Erica before an ace to Sandra had them leading 4-1.
- Two setting errors and a hitting error to the VD's saw their lead evaporate with points going on serve through to 8-8.
- A hot patch from Kaitlyn, obviously working well with Thelma, saw her hit 3 kills in a row and then complete a kill block to move the team ahead 13-8.
- Despite making the odd blocking error, the VD's went further ahead 22-12 with Sandra serving 6 points in a row assisted by kills to Erica, Jayne and Laura.
- The set was quite one-sided; as the Panthers struggled with the VD's power in attack as they went on to win the set 25-15.

**Set 2** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Jayne, and Laura

- The VD's made a good start to the second set with two early kills to Sandra and one to Erica, together with a back-row kill to Laura gave them a handy break 8-2 on the back of some aggressive serving from Kaitlyn and Thelma.
- A timeout to the Panthers couldn't halt the momentum the VD's were building. An ace to Sandra, kill to Erica, kill block to Kaitlyn and two aces to Erica saw their lead extend to 15-4.
- A quiet patch where the VD's were unable to terminate the point combined with a hitting error and service error saw the Panthers close the gap slightly 16-10.
- From here it was all one-way traffic with a kill to Kaitlyn and two aces to Laura, a kill to Sandra and two kill blocks to Erica before the Panthers blocked to trail 22-11.
- Erica scored another kill and then Thelma killed a Panthers overpass off service reception before going back to serve an ace to wrap up the set 25-11.

**Set 3** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Kylie, and Laura

- The third set was much closer; it felt like the VD's had taken their foot off the accelerator after effectively winning the match by claiming the first two sets.
- Two service reception errors, a hitting error and a ball handling error by the VD's had them trailing 1-4.
- Kills to Kylie, Erica and Sandra and kill blocks to Laura and Kaitlyn saw scores level at 7-7 in the third set. However, another string of errors saw the Panthers reclaim the lead 7-10, this time with blocking, hitting and service reception errors.
- Strong serving from Laura with two kills to both Sandra and Erica saw the VD's take the lead for the first time this set 15-13.
- However, once again an uncharacteristic run of errors saw the lead swap hands again with the VD's committing three service reception errors, two hitting errors and a blocking error to be trailing 15-19.
- With no timeouts remaining some strong words from the side of the court saw the VD's dig in and refuse to give in, three kills to Erica, a kill to Laura and an ace to Sandra saw the team ahead 23-21 when the siren sounded.

**Match comments:** After seeing the Panthers play on Saturday, we were confident going in to this match that we could win it. Their setter didn't run a quick attack and their team wasn't overly tall. Nevertheless, once we took the court against them it became obvious that they were excellent defenders and we quickly realised that we had great difficulty in defending left-handers. The Panthers had two quality left-handers, including one tall player who hit from every position in the front row, causing our defence all sorts of problems. We were a little disappointed how we played in the third set, serving less effectively and struggling in service reception, but we were glad to fight back and get our first win on the board and more importantly in straight sets.

**Set 1** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Kylie, and Laura

- After the VD's secured their first win earlier in the morning they got off to a strong start against ANU with kills to both Sandra and Erica to lead 3-0.
- The VD's inconsistency would once again prove problematic with two service errors, a hitting error and a service reception error causing them to be trailing 5-8 when ANU called their first time out.
- A kill to Kylie and Laura would see the VD's close the gap 7-8 and force ANU to call their second timeout, at which point it was apparent their setter was injured.
- ANU were forced to perform an illegal substitution, as their setter was no longer able to participate in the match, this caused a significant 5 minute delay as the player to take the court was not in uniform.
- Once play got back underway kills to Kaitlyn, Laura and Erica and aces to Kylie and Erica would see the VD's take the lead 13-9 and completely control the tempo of the match.
- The change in ANU's rotation clearly disrupted their play significantly and from here the VD's ran away with the set 25-14 with Laura serving 7 points in a row at one stage.

**Set 2** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Jayne, and Laura

- ANU had resolved their issues with their rotation and came out determined to make a good start in the second set with their backup setter.
- The VD's had a shocker to begin the second set and were forced to take a timeout 4-10 down after three hitting errors, a setting error and a blocking error early on.
- Kills to Jayne and Kaitlyn were negated by two more hitting errors in the next four points with the VD's down 6-12.
- From here some aggressive serving from Laura, including an ace, and three kills to Sandra saw the VD's level 12-12.
- Excellent backcourt defence from the VD's would present them with a large number of attacking opportunities in the latter half of the set. Unfortunately, the VD's couldn't capitalize and convert in attack.
- The teams continued on serve through to 23-23 with the VD's winning points with their kills, whilst their opposition were winning points from the VD's hitting errors.
- Kaitlyn killed an ANU overpass off service reception to wrap up the set 25-23.

**Set 3** – Line Up: Kylie, Erica (c), Sandra, Kaitlyn, Jayne, and Laura

- Time was always going to be against the VD's, in order to claim the 3-0 victory; due to the time delay in the first set and the lengthy second set. There were less than 5 minutes remaining on the clock at the start of the third set.
- Two kills and an ace to Sandra weren't enough to cover the two blocking and two hitting errors by the team and when the siren sounded the teams were locked at 6-6.

**Match comments:** This was a difficult match for the team, they knew if they stood any chance of making finals they needed to win it. It took them quite some time to get into rhythm in the first set. It was only once ANU had to replace their setter, who was dominating play with her quick attacks and slides, that the VD's got the upper hand. In the second set ANU's replacement setter was also amazing but she wasn't able to run the middle as frequently, as she was one of ANU's middle hitters. But at the end of the day the VD's were in control of the match and won, the points were basically determined on the back of the VD's attack, which was nowhere near as efficient as it had been in previous matches with a ridiculously high amount of hitting errors.

**Set 1** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Jayne, and Laura

- Although a spot in finals was now dependant on other results the VD's were determined to finish off their 2013 Good Neighbour campaign in style.
- A lively start by their opponents saw the VD's trail 2-6 after they committed 5 errors in a row. It was already clear that although their more senior opponents weren't going to hit cracking winners that the VD's would be required to work very hard for every point.
- Kills to Kaitlyn, Kylie, Erica and Laura saw the VD's close the gap 8-9.
- From here the momentum shifted and the VD's were limiting their errors and it showed on the score line. Two kills to Kaitlyn and one each to Laura and Sandra saw the VD's ahead 17-13 when the Golden Girls took a timeout.
- The VD's made an error soon after, when a set did not connect with the hitter and then the Golden Girls blocked twice to narrow the gap 18-17.
- This run was short lived as kills to Kaitlyn, Sandra, Kylie and Thelma as well as two aces to Thelma saw the VD's close out the set 25-18.

**Set 2** – Line Up: Kaitlyn, Thelma, Sandra, Erica (c), Jayne, and Laura

- Set two quickly got away from the Golden Girls as Erica, Sandra and Kaitlyn all hit 3 kills each to storm ahead 13-5.
- Near perfect serve reception assisted Thelma deliver some excellent sets to her hitters who continued on with their domination, 3 kills to Laura and one each to Sandra, Jayne and Erica extended their lead 20-8.
- The Golden Girls dug in with some excellent defence, but it was all a little too late as Kaitlyn shut out the set 25-13 with a kill block.
- Possibly one of the strongest sets from the VD's all tournament only committing 4 errors this entire set, none of which were hitting errors.

**Set 3** – Line Up: Kylie, Thelma, Erica (c), Jayne, Laura, Kaitlyn, and Sandra (L)

- After a near flawless second set the VD's committed a few early errors to be trailing 3-6 early in the third.
- Three kills to Kaitlyn after two spectacular digs from Erica saw the VD's regain control 7-6.
- An ace to Jayne followed by a kill to Kylie and Laura saw the VD's pull away further 11-7 and things looked ominous for the Golden Girls, however they responded with some great defence yet again and put the pressure back on the VD's causing them to commit 4 errors 13-12.
- Nevertheless, it was a one woman show from here on in, with Erica hitting 6 kills in a hot patch that saw the VD's cruise to a 22-14 lead when the siren sounded to claim the 3-0 victory.

**Match comments:** The team was confident of victory going into this match, the Golden Girls were a 50+ masters team competing in their 6<sup>th</sup> match of the tournament. Having said that, the VD's were made to win every point and the match, as their opposition made relatively few errors and certainly defended much better than their younger counterparts. Defensively the Golden Girls would mostly rely on using 1 block and having 5 players to defend the court, often with 6 up. Initially this caused the VD's some discomfort in attack, but ultimately forced them to vary their attack and to think more about shot selection, which is a known weakness of their game.

## **Final Placing:**

Unfortunately at the conclusion of the round robin phase of the tournament the team narrowly missed out on finishing in the top 2 of their pool. As a result, sadly the team did not qualify for finals on this occasion, but it was not for want of effort from all concerned.

As is always the case when teams from Tasmania travel interstate, at any level of competition, it was difficult for them to settle into play early in their first match. Playing at a much higher standard than they are use to, whilst dealing with nerves and the change in playing conditions are all contributing factors. Unfortunately for the team, as was the case when they competed at the 2010 Good Neighbour tournament, that first result would come back to haunt them come finals qualification.

We were fortunate enough to play some very strong teams and to learn from them. Interestingly, the two teams we placed behind in our pool won their respective semi finals and played off in the Gold Medal match against each other. Moreover, our point percentage was higher than all other 13 teams in the division, except that of the eventual Gold Medallist – University of NSW.

Knowing this, we certainly can't be disappointed in our performance, after all, we came away with three wins, two draws and our only loss of the tournament was to the eventual Gold Medallist.

## **Future:**

The tournament was very successful as far as achieving both team and individual goals, set prior to the tournament. However, there are certainly areas of our game technically that we need to work on, which haven't previously been tested, and playing this higher standard encouraged us to identify these and hopefully we can work on these in the future.

Mentally we need to be much stronger, in particularly with respect to starting a match strongly and maintaining that concentration throughout the remainder of the set, especially at this higher level. With this tournament format it was clear that the first set of each match was crucial if you wanted to walk away with a win rather than a draw, unfortunately we narrowly lost the first set on a number of occasions and due to time restrictions only managed to force the draw rather than come back and win the match.

To win consistently at this level it is also apparent that we need to be physically fitter and stronger. The higher standard teams, and those in honours, were more physically dominating and powerful on the court and the results showed. It may be useful preparation for us in future to not only concentrates on technique as a team, but also on strength and conditioning as a team, which is usually left to the individuals themselves.

We are unsure what future interstate tournaments we may target in the near future; it will most likely depend on finances. It is clear that the team would like to attempt to compete at the highest level possible and certainly will be looking to work on their deficiencies to ensure that this is possible.

It has certainly become very apparent that our continued presence in local volleyball within Tasmania, as a team, is a significant contributor to increasing the standard across the board. However, it is also clear that if they continue to play together locally that opportunities for competition will be limited and that for future individual and team growth that interstate travel will more than likely be the only way they can continue to progress down the player pathway.

### **Refereeing Opportunities:**

As with most tournaments at this level a requirement of entry is the completion of assigned duty; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> referees, scorers and 2 line judges. We see this as a great opportunity to develop our skill set at this level and as we regularly compete in these higher standard competitions, we have come to expect this requirement.

During our team debriefs throughout the tournament we also discuss any refereeing decisions that may have been questionable during either our matches or assigned duties. Discussion of not only our playing performance but also our refereeing performance is as equally important and fundamental in player development at the elite level.

We feel that this officiating requirement should be in place for all elite competitions in Tasmania, as it not only places responsibility on each team to be qualified for this task but also improves the level of play within the team if each member knows the rules and are confident in their application.

We were required to complete 5 duties over the two days, only one less than matches played. This provided ample opportunity for players to rotate through all assigned officiating positions to gain valuable experience. It was evident that Tasmanians are considerably harsher in applying the double contact rule than the rest of the Country and that the rest of the Country is quicker to control teams on court conduct.

Interestingly, if a team fails to comply with duty requirements at this tournament they are deducted 4 competition points, fined \$150 and may be denied entry to the tournament the following year.

### **Coaching Opportunities:**

Personally as a Coach, the value of competing at this or any other interstate tournament is invaluable. To be exposed to a multitude of varying offensive and defensive tactics from teams with differing skill sets to those in Tasmania is not only important for your development as a coach, but the development of your athletes.

It was rewarding and challenging to be put under pressure from the higher standard of competition and the tactics of teams and coaches that are unknown to me. Whilst at the same time it was quite demanding to coach my own athletes at this level and to try and encourage them and motivate them to succeed, something that I still need to fine tune.

The Van Diemens Volleyball Club – Division 1 Women’s team will need to train harder and better in the future if they wish to take that next step and either win a medal in division 1 or compete in Honours at an interstate tournament, but they look forward to the challenge. The team would like to thank Volleyball Tasmania Inc. for their wonderful support, both financially and in person. Without this support the team could not compete with the best teams in the country and represent Tasmanian volleyball on the big stage.

Chris Rice.