

## **Baptism of Fire!**

Saturday 24 June was the date of the City of Manchester Water Polo Festival held at the Manchester Aquatic Centre. A water polo tournament gathering teams from all over the country as far afield as Devon, Durham, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and Wales.

The tournament was split into two age groups, 14&U and 12&U.

It was going to be COPA's first ever games together as a team, having only started playing water polo at the beginning of the year!!!

COPA's team comprised of 11 players, 6 eligible for the 12&U age group, with the majority of our players playing up an age group, it was going to be tough!

We arrived at the tournament early morning full of excitement. On seeing the pool area a number of the players fell quite with the realisation of how big a competition this was going to be.

We set up camp on pool side ready to go!

The age group was split into four groups, with five teams in each group. We had been drawn in Group D along with Sheffield Stingrays, Northampton, Solihull and Manchester Grammar School (MGS).

The first game was against Solihull. The game started with a couple of quick goals by Solihull. COPA seemed to be a little shell shocked and overawed by the occasion and they never really got into the game. Solihull eventually won the game. It was a quick and very steep learning curve for our players.

Game Two saw a change in tactics against MGS and a change in fortune. Strong tigerish defending at the back by Billy Bamber and Dougie Quayle help restrict the scoring opportunities for MGS. Jacob Gibson received the ball on the left wing, he danced around a defender, swam in on goal, rose and powered home a rocket of a shot into the top corner, Goal! Sandra Krivokapic played strong in pit attack, turning her man and almost creating a superb individual goal only to be thwarted by a last ditch tackle. MGS were the victors but it was a marked improvement by COPA having got the nerves and cobwebs out of their system after game one.

Game Three and the opposition was a strong Northampton team. COPA kept to the same tactics which again restricted Northampton's scoring opportunities. COPA's confidence was growing shown by Nathan Higham, Jake Bamber, Oliver Taylor and Jacob creating strong scoring opportunities, only to be beaten by a determined keeper or the frame of the goal. Jake free on the left wing received the ball, turned on his back looking for the pass. The Northampton defender tried to steal the ball. Jake wasn't having any of this and the defender was met with a mouthful of Jake's

foot. Whistle, exclusion, the first of the day! You wouldn't have been able to lay a bet on a Bamber getting the first exclusion for the team!!!

Game Four was against the unbeaten Sheffield Stingrays and was going to be the toughest challenge. Their side was stacked with behemoths who towered over the majority of our team. After a talk the fears were allied, after all *'they're all the same size in the water'*

Daniel Leach in goal made some strong saves against a powerful shooting side. Lizzie Quayle worked hard all day, up and down the right wing covering more water than most. Sheffield on the attack, Jacob and Bobby Quayle looking to steal the ball, whistle, Penalty! Jacob drowned the Sheffield player to get the second exclusion foul of the day. Sheffield were a well drilled and strong side who came out the winners. Talking to their coach after the game I learnt they take in swimmers from the age of four and the majority of her players had been playing for over five years.

So the end of the pool games and our next match was to be against City of Chester. Bobby took to the goals of the first half with Daniel going between the posts for the second half.

The game was end to end with strong defending by the 'Bash Brothers' Billy and Dougie, helped by Marina Krivokapic who managed to just tip the ball out of the hand of the opposition as they were bearing down on goal. Bobby passed the ball out to Jacob on the right wing, he carried the ball forward looking for the pass. Oliver broke down the middle of the pool. Jacob passed to Oliver. He rose out of the water, in the image of Poseidon with choirs of mermaids singing their ethereal songs, and shot the ball past the keeper... Goal! Second half and Bobby and Daniel swapped positions. Daniel made some great saves in goal, tipping on to the post and blocking a hard shot to his left. Bobby out of goal tried to assert his mark on the game. He received the ball from Daniel and walked the ball forward looking for a pass. With no options he took a speculative shot on goal from within his own half. The ball arced high and to the right. It reached zero gravity and began its downward descent. The keeper reached for the ball... Goal! Eat your heart out David Beckham! A strong performance by the team saw them narrowly beaten.

Final game of the day and the opponents were Sheffield Sharks. The team was ready and eager to get back in the water. The game started positively with strong defending key to our game. Some good saves by Bobby kept the team in the game. Jacob swam past his defender on the left wing, bearing down on goal with ball in hand, he dummied, dummied, dummied, keeper dropped, shot... Goal! Oliver, Nathan and Jake created further scoring chances in the second half. Despite the best efforts of the team Sheffield in the end were too strong and they won the game.

For their first games ever and having only started in January and with the majority of the team playing up an age group they did themselves and the Club proud. They

never gave in and played to the last whistle showing a lot of heart. The improvement they showed from the first game to the last was there to be seen by all.

A big well done to all the players. The hard work begins now for the tournament next year and the games in between.

Thank you to Chris Higham for helping 'control' the players and the parents and families for their support.

And Finally...

as Yazz & the Plastic Population said in 1988... The Only Way is Up!

Team:

1. Daniel Leach; 2. Nathan Higham; 3. Oliver Taylor; 4. Bobby Quayle; 5. Jacob Gibson; 6. Jake Bamber; 7. Billy Bamber; 8. Dougie Quayle; 9. Sandra Krivokapic; 10. Marina Krivokapic; 11. Lizzie Quayle