

Claire Brownie

This year has seen a massive turn around for netball in Scotland with many new and exciting opportunities which I have been fortunate to experience. This year I have played Superleague games live on Sky television, played in two European Championships, a Test series against Singapore in Scotland, a Test series against Barbados and St Vincent and Grenadines in the Caribbean and I have travelled to New Zealand for a training and acclimatisation camp before the World Youth Netball Championships in the Cook Islands. This time last year I could never have imagined the year that has just past. Not only have I have competed at all these events but furthermore, I was Vice-Captain of the Senior Scotland Team and Co-Captain of the U21 team for the World Championships.



The season kicked off last August with Superleague trials for Glasgow Wildcats, which is practically the Scotland Senior squad. Trials were successful and the new, very intense programme started which included travelling to and training 3/4 times a week in Glasgow. In addition to the netball training, 2 ball management sessions, 2 strength and conditioning, 2 endurance and one speed and agility session are endured every week to make up 6 days of training a week, with training often twice a day! This intense programme was stepped up again when netball was included in the Scottish Institute of Sport programme in January 2009.

Away from the training grounds, Glasgow Wildcats faced tough opposition in the Superleague, however improvements were evident in the comparison of the statistics from each game between the first and second half of the season, with the squad pulling off two wins live on Sky TV at the tail end of the season. Swiftly after the Superleague season ended the Scottish National Squad became the focus and the Senior European Championships were the next target on our list. Only a month prior to these championships the U21 Europeans occurred and we finished a disappointing fourth. The Senior Squad fared better and met their target of second place, allowing Scotland to move 2 places up the world rankings to make our ambition of reaching the 2010 Commonwealth Games more feasible.

A successful Test series against Singapore was vital for improving Scotland's ranking and the team managed to achieve two convincing wins to take 13th place from Singapore.

Next destination was a tour to Barbados where tough opposition and a very different style of netball was faced. The tour started well with a win over the U21 Barbados team. In Test 1 we were one ahead going into the third and lost disappointingly by 11 in the end. Unfortunately I tore ankle ligaments on the post stands early in the 3rd quarter. Despite having a 'tree trunk' foot and ankle I still played in the remaining games. Scotland earned a Test win versus St Vincent and the Grenadines and again beat a resilient U21 Barbados team.

In the 2nd Test against Barbados, Scotland gave their all and narrowed the deficit this time to 8.

After, only being back on Scottish soil and a further 6 weeks of training, I was jet setting again for netball but this time it was right across the world to New Zealand and the Cook Islands for the 2009 World Youth Championships. Twenty teams from around the world were competing in the eleven day tournament held in a new 2 court stadium. I was extremely proud to carry the Scottish Flag for the Opening Ceremony on my 21st Birthday! With a tough pool draw that included New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, Scotland did not get the results they were aiming for. Saying that though, the game against New Zealand, one of the top sides in the world, was the team's best performance in the Championships and one of the most enjoyable despite facing defeat. Following the group stages, Scotland only had one remaining aim and that was to convincingly win the remainder of their round robin games. This target was reached and meant Scotland finished 17th in the world. Although, we were all disappointed with the result, the World Youth Championships were an amazing experience that everyone enjoyed and learnt so much which is essential for Scotland's future development!