

Netball South Summer Camp 2016 (15th - 19th August)



Almost fifty young netballers and more than six coaches – most from the region’s Performance Pathway Academies – came together for a week of high-intensity training and match-play in August. It was a tough daily programme of strength & conditioning, technical and tactical on-court sessions, match-play, pool sessions and evening workshops in the delightful surroundings of Bradfield College near Reading. Sounds gruelling ... is gruelling ... but we did have lots of fun, too.

This year’s Camp theme was ‘Fearless ... we created a training environment where it was ‘ok’ to make mistakes; we also wanted the players to take some risks ... going on ‘flying interceptions’, taking on defenders to be free or create some space (instead of continually cutting back towards the ball as it’s easier). We actually wanted the players to make mistakes so they could quickly learn from them. There were a few anxious expressions along the way as players faced both mental and physical challenges that often took them outside their comfort zone: the majority had never before experienced this level of training on consecutive days, let alone be “allowed” to make mistakes!

We started with the athletes identifying, discussing and agreeing the traits and characteristics of an ‘ideal’ teammate and used these to set the expectations for Camp. Each athlete then set some meaningful goals for the week.

This was a bit of an eye-opener for some of the non-regional-level players who admitted that they didn’t really know how to set SMART goals ... it took a little longer than anticipated but we got there!

The girls received help to overcome their anxiety during an entertaining, interactive sports psychology workshop delivered by Stephen Ford. In small groups, the athletes identified what it takes to be fearless and then shared their thoughts. Feeding back to the coaches and other athletes produced some toe-tapping raps and lyrical poems! One of the common elements was ‘confidence’, so the athletes then looked at ways of being and remaining confident ... including having strategies to control anxiety and other emotions.

By Wednesday, the athletes were showing signs of fatigue but soon perked up when local coaching legend, Kat Ratnapala, came in to deliver a thought-provoking defending session.

Thursday was a day of teamwork: the squads for the tournament had an opportunity to get to know each other, and the opposition, by competing in activities such as building the highest tower out of trainers, building and flying a glider, memorising and re-creating an image, and many others.

The squads then worked through some match-play scenarios in preparation for the Friday tournament.

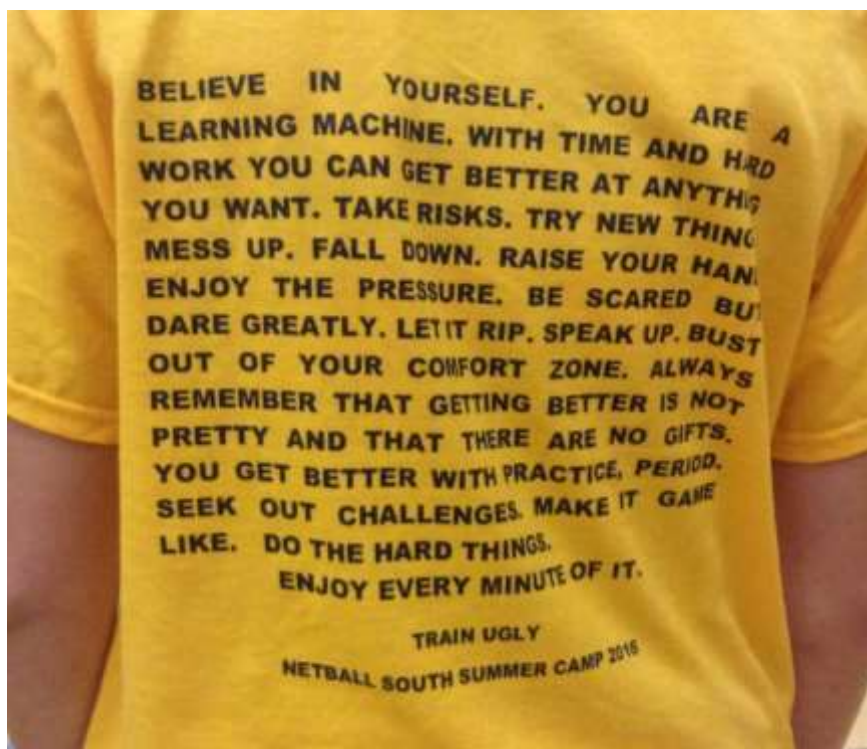
The recovery session in the pool turned out to be *entirely* different to the planned session: the coaches from the Synchro Swim squad (also on a training camp) agreed to put our girls through some synchro moves, which was fun. Obviously our next challenge for the girls was, in their squads for Friday, to come up with a 90–120-second routine. They had just 20 minutes to sort it out before performing in front of an ‘expert’ panel; each group was awarded marks for synchronicity and technical difficulty. There was so much interaction and laughter ... amazing!

Thursday concluded with the Netball South’s Got Talent Show. Nine groups choreographed and performed their own sport-related dance routine to music of their choice. Another ‘expert’ panel awarded points.

Going with tradition, the Camp culminated with a tournament, organised entirely by the athletes. This was the final opportunity for the girls to practise their new skills, and put their understanding into play. The outcome was a series of competitive matches with some truly excellent play.

We debriefed back in the boarding house: the athletes reviewed their individual goals and assessed their progress and/or achievement; ‘next-step’ goals were also set and everyone agreed to share them with me via email post-camp. There was then an opportunity to record feedback on the Camp schedule and activities before the girls departed with new friends, new netball knowledge and skills, and with life experiences each will be able to draw on in the future.

The coaching team agreed how pleasing it is to see the progress each athlete made during the week and how, when the going got tough, everyone pulled together to get through the task. The girls should be proud of their accomplishments during the week; each demonstrated resilience, relentlessness, diversity, unity and – importantly – fearlessness.



Thanks to Bradfield College for making us feel very welcome; to Netball South for supporting the event; to the coaches who worked from 7am until at least 10pm each day and then tried to catch-up with what was happening in Rio; to the athletes who just worked; and to their parents who had to listen to the ‘stories from Camp’ in the nightly phone calls and on the journey home ... if ‘daughter’ managed to stay awake, that is!!!