

WOMENS WORLD Q&A FIONA CLARK



Photo by Denis & Becky - Pellerins Photography

We recently caught up with Fiona Clark, immediate Past President of the International Federation of Women's Lacrosse Associations (IFWLA), and Chair of the Executive Board in charge of World Cup 2009 for some of her thoughts on this event. Fiona served on the IFWLA for 22 consecutive years, eight as VP Tours & Tournaments, and seven as President. She is very familiar with World Events, having undertaken the role of Executive Director in 1989 in Perth for the 3rd World Cup, and ten years later for the 2nd U19 World Championship.

Q: Fiona, having been involved with six World Cups what do you consider has been the main role of the International Federation over the years with the conduct of these events?

A: Overseeing all aspects of an international sport such as lacrosse is an awesome, often onerous task, and one that has been in the hands of a single body, the IFWLA, from 1972 - 2008. Since its formation it has been responsible for promoting, developing and regulating competition, and as part of this charter the IFWLA has conducted the World Cup every four years since the inaugural event in 1982, and more recently the U19 World Championship, also every 4 years, since 1995.

The IFWLA also hosted an annual conference for delegates from member countries, and at all times we would strive to develop a broader awareness of our sport throughout the world. These meetings effectively established the direction international lacrosse would take over the ensuing four years. What came out of these annual gatherings was a uniform set of International Rules and Regulations for competition, which lends lacrosse a sense of global consistency, so often lacking in other sports. These rules are played in all World events.

With the competition and rules in place we, of course,

needed the players! So another of our key roles has been in development, and much of this was progressed through the International Lacrosse Development Committee (ILDC). The IFWLA Past VP for Education and Training, Denise Wescott, has been an integral part of expanding the horizons of our sport throughout the world, and in a former role was pivotal to the German Women's Lacrosse Program as their Head Coach for many years. The IFWLA is pleased to have been able to have facilitated player's dreams and aspirations to achieve their goals by representing their country at the highest level of competition in our sport.

Q: Are there any countries that you've seen really grow?

A: The IFWLA has been dedicated to the development of lacrosse, and over the years we have seen growth in most of the countries. Japan initiated an amazing developmental program from the outset, since becoming members of the IFWLA in 1989, and they now boast in excess of 15,000 players (including 9,000 senior women and 800 junior women). Their work, however, is also reflected in the development we are seeing in other parts of Asia, particularly China and Korea, where the JLA conducts programs, promotes competition, and through the Asia Pacific Lacrosse Union conducts the ASPAC Games

every two years. The JLA also encourage teams of all age groups to travel annually to Australia and the USA to help improve their game.

The USA continues to grow their women's membership, 76,000 and counting! Their development will continue to test the rest of the world in keeping up with their National Team at World Events, particularly Australia, who are traditionally their greatest rivals, and where the national numbers remain static at around 2,000 for women (seniors and juniors). USA has also spread the horizons of the game across the country, with lacrosse now being played more extensively on the West Coast. This same 'spread of horizons' is what we are beginning to see in Europe, which is really exciting, and was particularly evident with four new European countries represented at this World Cup for the first: the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark and Ireland. Having the World Cup in Europe, and particularly in the Czech Republic where many of these players have played before in European Championships, the Prague Cup etc., was a real plus for participation by our new European countries.

Q: What are some of the main differences you've seen in the game?

A: Since that inaugural year, when players took to the



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field in Nottingham, England, the face of international lacrosse has altered considerably, both as a result of IFWLA's actions and its reactions to continuing trends and changes in sport generally. Some of the more significant changes have been in the rules of the game such as hard boundaries, free substitution, the restraining line and an increase in squad sizes to 24 in 2009. Also the structure of the World Cup continues to become more professional with every event. The IFWLA has been rewarding excellence, consistency and commitment to the conduct of this pinnacle event in areas such as commentating, with John Schuett having just called his third women's world tournament, and in photography with Pellerins Photography contracted in 2009 after their huge success at the Women's U19 in Canada two years ago. We also saw this recognition on the bench with Chip Rogers and Beth Stone leading their teams of bench officials.

I also think these days players are better prepared and better equipped to handle the pressures of a big meet, and no matter their result at this event they will take these new found skills back to their own countries and hopefully help develop other players.

Q: What do you like about the women's World Cup?

A: I have always said that sporting competition provides probably the best forum for fostering international communication and peace, and this was particularly evident with so many nations competing this time. In fact, our World Cup Mission Statement is "To provide the opportunity to compete at the highest standard of women's lacrosse, where social and cultural interaction is fostered and encouraged."

I particularly enjoyed the spirit in which the games were played, and the atmosphere wherein the players competed with fairness, determination and discipline. The sharing of cultures and the warmth of friendship and hospitality was abundant both on and off the field.

Everyone's spirit and coping mechanisms really came to the fore when the heavens opened after the first few days of play, and whilst joy soon turned to anguish when the rain didn't cease, and the grass fields became unplayable, including the main stadium, the players changed venues and surfaces and just 'got on with the game!'

I loved the enthusiasm of the volunteers around the venue; they were always willing and pleased to see that our every need was satisfied, whether it was a question, some advice, or just a friendly conversation. They were always visible, so this provided us a great opportunity to get to know them all. Our liaison was Bohdan Fuka, and his enjoyment of the event, his 'can do anything' attitude, and his colourful character certainly added volumes to yet another wonderful lacrosse experience. Of course, it's always fun to catch up with fellow lacrosse enthusiasts from around the world, and these quadrennial gatherings provide the ideal setting for this camaraderie. The supporter crowds are always amazing, instrumental and vocal, and add much to the atmosphere of these events!

Q: How was this tournament different to past ones?

A: This was the biggest World Cup in the event's 27-year history, and whilst it's impossible to say exactly what the magic formula is that makes each World Cup so unique I think the World Cup 2009 will be remembered

primarily for the greatest number of teams, the mixing of cultures, and the friendly atmosphere.

This World Cup was the culmination of four years of planning and hard work since the Czech Republic's successful bid to host at the 2006 IFWLA Conference in Cardiff, Wales. The preparation lead-in period was led initially by Veronika Brychcinova and Barbara Klimoszko, and then the unflappable, quiet, unassuming Ondrej Mika, took over the head Co-ordinator role to allow Veronika and Barbara to concentrate on their other key roles – as players on the Czech Team! This was the first time in the history of the sport that national competing players have taken such a leading role in the organization of an event of this calibre. Other players were also involved in various ways, and the Head Coach, Martin Mrlik, was extremely active – in fact he was responsible for marking the grounds, and on the pre-opening day was seen suspended from the roof of the stadium hanging the flags!! Another 'first' for a National Coach!! Whilst this perhaps highlighted the limited human resources, it also highlighted the enthusiasm, commitment and teamwork of those involved in Czech Lacrosse!

Another key difference was the huge leap in web-based technology that has taken place over the years. For ten days around the world computer keys were clicking and disk drives whirring as games were shown live for the first time ever, and statistics and results collated and distributed. This efficient communication network, which generated such interest, was thanks to Petr Tahal, the organizing committee IT Manager, who did a great job. I know that in the Southern Hemisphere Aussies were get-



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**FINAL STANDINGS –
WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2009**

1. USA
2. AUSTRALIA
3. CANADA
4. ENGLAND
5. IRELAND
6. WALES
7. JAPAN
8. SCOTLAND
9. CZECH REPUBLIC
10. GERMANY
11. HAUDENOSAUNEE
12. NEW ZEALAND
13. NETHERLANDS
14. AUSTRIA
15. DENMARK
16. SOUTH KOREA

FIL WOMEN'S WORLD TEAM 2009

GOALKEEPER
Sue McSolvin, AUS

DEFENCE

Regina Oliver, USA
Amber Falcone, USA
Sarah Forbes, AUS

MIDFIELD

Kristen Kjellman, USA
Stacey Morlang, AUS
Sarah Albrecht, USA
Dana Dobbie, CAN
Laura Warren, WAL

ATTACK

Hannah Nielsen, AUS
Jen Adams, AUS
Lindsey Munday, USA

STORM AWARDS

Best goalie: Sue Mc Solvin, AUS
Best defender: Amber Falcone, USA
Greatest team

improvement: Olivia Kim, South Korea

CHANCE AWARDS

Most goals: Sarah Sweetts, NED
Most assists: Jen Adams, AUS
Most points: Jen Adams, AUS

ting up in the middle of the night to watch live telecasts, and since I've been back home in Perth I've received many thanks to the Czechs for providing this facility, with keen lacrosse followers saying they were able to 'live the games!'

It was great that the accommodation and playing complex were all within walking distance, and that there was an extensive range of facilities so close to each other. This was particularly welcome on the night of the final banquet and party!

Jenny Haynes, the IFWLA VP Competition, compiled the playing schedule, and did an amazing job. The three pools of play ensured some close matches particularly amongst some of the new teams. The proximity of fields enabled players not only to compete against one another in their own pool, but also to observe the competition in the other pools, which was a huge plus for the event.

Q: Now that your term as International President is finished what were your personal highlights of this World Cup?

A: Wow, there are so many memorable moments, and so many highlights. I fondly recall arriving into Prague-Ruzyně International Airport with Jenny Haynes and meeting the Scotland Team. After some introductions one of the Scottish players thanked us for the work we had done in leading the Federation and making this event possible! I thought this was a really nice acknowledgment prior to the World Cup even starting!

Another was standing proudly, and a little teary-eyed,

watching SIXTEEN teams march in the Opening Ceremony, well SEVENTEEN, including the officials; it was amazing to see them entering the stadium ~ they just kept coming! Seeing them sporting their country colours, carrying their national flags with country emblems, some held high on lacrosse sticks, was a stirring sight. The Haudenosaunee Team looked particularly magnificent in their native dress. During the ten days the spectators looked equally as resplendent as they also wore their national colours, and adorned themselves with the names of players, their daughters, sisters, friends, etc., and they certainly added to the whole atmosphere. Australia boasted in excess of one hundred supporters!

I loved seeing Korea and Denmark's final match when at the end of the game they joined hands and ran across the field to the spectators as 'one.'

Receiving IFWLA Honorary Life Membership, alongside Susie Ganzenmuller, Feffie Barnhill, Marge Garinger and Sue Redfern was a huge thrill, and it was an honour to join those who have gone before us in receiving this highest of accolades, Maggie Boyd, Jane Vache, Liz Blaydes, Jackie Pitts and Lanetta Ware. These were the women who pioneered our sport internationally, and to whom we shall all be forever grateful.

I was also very honoured to be asked to present Susie Ganzenmuller with her International Honorary Umpire award; Susie was my VP Rules & Umpiring until 2007, and she has been inspirational in the work she has done, and continues to do in this specialist field. She is such a professional, and I just love working with her, and impor-

tantly she is also a very good friend.

It was yet another thrill to be recognized with a 'Global Leader' award at the final banquet ~ the FIL President, Feffie Barnhill, caught me by complete surprise there!

There were indeed many great moments, and I am sure that we have all returned to our respective countries with pleasant and lasting memories of this event, and of the hospitality of the people of Prague.

Q: How would you sum up World Cup 2009?

A: This World Cup was a significant sporting milestone for lacrosse, which I believe has fired the imagination, and provided the impetus for greater improvement for many players throughout the world in the future with new heroes, new hopes and new challenges.

The Czech Lacrosse Association's love affair with hosting big events has now seen them host the biggest of them all, and they should be justifiably proud of their efforts and their achievements. The event had it all ~ a blend of experience and youth, a recognition of great past achievements and future potential, a farewell to the IFWLA, and the beginning of a new era with the Federation of International Lacrosse (FIL) ~ it was all there in the 8th Women's World Cup.

The IFWLA salutes and thanks our hosts for the success of this event. World Cup 2009 was truly a celebration of women's lacrosse.