

## **World Gateball Championships. Shanghai, September 17<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Australia was represented by five teams - the Wombats from Melbourne, the Koalas and the Brolgas both of which were composed of Queensland players, a team from Canberra C.C. and a team from Southport C.C. On Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> all the Aussies assembled at the Weson Grand Hotel situated close to the newly developed Free Trade region of the Pudong area of Shanghai. Also staying at the hotel, (which must have only just made it to its 3 star rating) were 15 teams from Brazil and 2 teams from Paraguay.

The training on Thursday afternoon went ahead despite some official hesitancy to allow us to use the courts. Twelve courts were set up but were very congested as so many teams tried to gain some areas in which to practice. The unfamiliar surface had much longer grass than what we are used to. However, the 16 Chinese teams seemed very attuned to the conditions when several Australian teams played ad-hoc games against them. Their skills were excellent, and their strategies intriguing but devastating against us.

Again, after much persistence, on Friday morning the Australian teams made their way to an early practice sessions hoping to find spaces to do drills and teams to play against. The Brazilians were finally taken to the beautifully appointed park as well. Southport lost a practice game against a young, skilled Brazilian team who impressed us all with their enthusiasm and their determination to visit Australia to play in the Australian Titles next year.

There was an Opening Ceremony, which consisted of many speeches by various officials to the 92 teams assembled across the courts. Dancers wearing colourful costumes and performers doing a Dragon Dance then entertained us. For all 3 days of the Championships, there were English-speaking guides assigned to each team as well as many orange – shirted volunteers who took care of our belongings. The weather was extremely hot and humid. Bottles of water were much needed and freely available.

On Saturday morning Canberra played on Court 2 and won their game against a Korean team 10 - 7. We were all excited by that result.

Southport followed them on the same court but played a Brazilian team. Great jubilation followed Southport's win 16-9. Everyone played very well, did not suffer from 'nerves' and carried out their game plan very capably.



*Canberra's team before game against Korean Union team and the smiles of the Southport team show their delight after their win.*

The Saturday afternoon games were tough ones for all the teams. Although everyone was heartened by the morning's results, none of the teams won their 2<sup>nd</sup> match. Southport was 10-all until the last 5 minutes but lost 10-13 to a team from Hong Kong. The referees for the games were a pleasure to watch with their quick decisions and crisp hand movements. In addition, they strictly controlled the movement of players and captains around the 1 metre edge of the court.

We all hoped that Sunday morning would bring better results because there was the strong desire that maybe this time an Australian team would go through to the next round. Canberra won a seesawing game against Brazil 15-7. Southport again played straight after Canberra on that court – our lucky court? We hoped so. The opposition team was made up of 5 young men from Sakhalin in Russia. With 1 minute to go, the score was 10 all. Both teams made errors but the Russian team scored an extra point to win a closely fought game.

### **World Gateball contd:**

Canberra came second in their pool. Southport came third. Unfortunately, the other teams did not win a game. However, they had some competitive results, or had chances to dictate the play, but were beaten by extraordinarily skilled shots that destroyed set plays. All the team members gained so much experience from playing against teams from other

countries. Hopefully, in the next World Championships, to be held in Japan in 2014, an Australian team gets through to, at least, the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of the competition.

Watching the semi-finals and finals was a real pleasure despite the difficulty to get a viewing spot with the enormous crowds straining to see the court. Crowds were 6-8 deep around the perimeter. All the spectators were knowledgeable and enthusiastic in their support particularly since the Chinese teams dominated these games. The team from Fujian won the World Championships by defeating the team from Yunnan 9-7.

Congratulations to all of the players from Australia but particularly to the team from Canberra who came so close to making the 2<sup>nd</sup> round. This team is very experienced despite its youthfulness. It has won so many competitions leading up to these World Titles and continues to improve, innovate and adapt to different conditions and tactics. Southport is very happy to have won one game in their first effort at these World Titles. With young players entering into the Club to play Gateball, Southport will be vying to represent Australia again in 2014.

*Barbara Northcott*