



PRESS RELEASE
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SINGAPORE OFF TO A WINNING START AT NATIONS CUP

'Battle of the Nations' living up to expectations on opening day

The 8th edition of the Nations Cup opened today with three exciting matches to set the scene for this truly global competition.

In front of a roaring crowd at Toa Payoh Sports Hall, hosts **Singapore** opened proceedings against the **Republic of Ireland** - who are making their second appearance in the competition following a sixth place finish in 2012 – and made sure the crowd had plenty to cheer about with a **42-31** victory.

The team in green have improved markedly from their last outing and they pushed Singapore all the way with an opening quarter score of nine goals apiece. Singapore settled down in the second and third quarters and played their familiar fast and flat style of game.

Making her first appearance for Singapore in the Nations Cup, Goal Defence Olivia Flanagan had a stand-out performance and produced a high rate of turnovers rate pushing play back into their attacking half and upsetting Ireland's rhythm. A half-time score of 22-15 gave Singapore a slight cushion but they had to keep the work rate high against an Irish side that play a similar style and were aggressive and eager throughout the match.

Singapore managed to make use of all their shooters during the four quarters after Chen Huifen and Cassandra Soh gave them the edge. Yu Meiling came on for the second half and recorded a 100% shooting average from her 11 attempts.

Speaking after their opening victory, Co-Vice Captain for Singapore, Nurul Baizura was very happy with the performance saying, "Both teams were flustered at the start with some nerves but we settled down, kept things simple and delivered our game plan. Everyone did very well, coped with the pressure of being at home and it was a very good opening for us. Hopefully Ruth was happy with us and her first home win."

Ireland dug deep and took the final quarter by two goals (7-9) but the damage had been done and they must now regroup and prepare to take on Uganda tomorrow who missed their opening match today due to a travel delay. They will arrive in town later tonight and being their proceedings tomorrow. Ireland must capitalise on their advantage now they have one hard match under their belts and Uganda will have to adjust to conditions quickly.

Irish Coach, Kaylea McQuade was pleased with her teams' performance and the progress they have made in the past 12 months.

She explained, "That match went a lot better for us than last year. Still things we can improve on but overall I am quite happy. We know what to expect this year and the girls have come out fighting."

"Since last year I have been able to get more contact time with the team and the players themselves have increased their training on and off the court so we are much fitter and stronger than last year. The girls have got the confidence and ability to beat the teams here. We lack experience so I think it may take us a few games to really settle on but it is a good start for us."

Singapore Coach, Ruth Aitken, was making her debut as National Coach on home soil and was certainly pleased with the team's strength and commitment. She said, "It was wonderful playing in front of a home crowd but with that comes a bit of responsibility and I think there were a lot of nerves out there today. They really wanted to do well and in attack we found it hard to relax but we were outstanding in defence. Credit goes to Ireland who contested really well throughout the match."

"This time last year I was watching from the stands and now I feel so much part of the team and I am really pleased that we have delivered win one but we have a long way to go. It is how we recover now and get on tomorrow."

Singapore face PNG tomorrow and Aitken is ready for a tougher match. She added, "That will be very intense tomorrow, they have a really tall shooter and will be aggressive throughout the court so we will have to lift our game but that is what this competition is all about."

The aggression and physicality of **Papua New Guinea (PNG)** was on show in the second match of the day when they took on **Sri Lanka**.

PNG are the highest ranked team in the competition (18th) and were champions back in 2008. Sri Lanka sit in 23rd position in the world currently and are making their fifth appearance in the Nations Cup but the gap in rankings faded into the background once the on-court battle began. PNG took the lead but Sri Lanka picked up their pace in the second quarter to draw it 17 goals each and end the first half eight goals behind PNG.

Two sides of varying strengths and statures clashed in the mid-court and both teams were counting on the height and accuracy of their shooters. For Sri Lanka, they once again have the towering presence of Tharjini Sivalingam as their Goal Shooter (GS) while PNG went with Tiata Baldwin as GS and the experienced Co-Captain Maleeta Roberts supporting her in Goal Attack.

It looked set to be a tight second half but the 'Pepes' athletic style and physical presence across the court meant they stayed strong and confident to win increase their advantage and take the match **52-76**.

Roberts was happy with the opening result saying, "No match is ever easy. We started off really strongly but Sri Lanka started to gain on us so we had to work really hard to maintain our lead and then extend it."

Looking ahead to their match against Singapore tomorrow, she added, “We need to start of strongly like we did today. Again they are a different style so we need to play our game – short and sharp – and get in front and we will be ok.”

Sri Lankan Captain Mareesha Fernando can see the potential in her teammates. She said, “We have some new players so it was always going to be tough. We struggled in the centre court and against their double-defending of Tharjini but I hope we can make less mistakes and learn from today.

Final match of the day was unusual for the tournament as it was a ‘friendly’ game between Nation Cup debutants **United States of America (USA)** and **Singapore ‘A’** after Uganda failed to arrive in time for their opening match. As a result USA takes the two points today for a win and Uganda forfeits the match and starts their campaign against Ireland tomorrow.

The Singapore side was made up of the remaining Opens squad players and members of the 21&U team. All the girls have been training hard and supporting the Singapore team in their preparations for Nations Cup so they were ready for the challenge of taking on the 19th ranked side in the world. They had nothing to lose and played their hearts out taking the first quarter 15-13.

The USA was feeling confident when they touched down in Singapore for the first time but were unsettled by their Asian opponents and the differing style of play. They slowly settled in the second quarter and took the half 21-31 but were made to work hard for their goals.

The advantage was stretched to 14 points by end of the third half but some grit and determination by the home side saw them close out strongly with a fantastic performance in the final quarter to win it impressively (19-8) to end the match in the tightest of fashions, only three goals separating the two sides in the end - **50-53** in USA’s favour - but a tough match for both sides and not the walk-over the USA may have expected.

Co-Captain for Singapore ‘A’ Jocelyn Ng was delighted with the performance. She said, “I felt that was really amazing to come back from such a margin to lose by only three goals, I am really proud of the team. We really didn’t expect to get this opportunity and we are thankful for that.”

USA Captain Annette Payne said. “That was a tough game but it has helped us to prepare for what lies ahead. We tried out players in many different positions to see how things would work and with patience and experience we got our win at the end of the day.”

The action continues tomorrow.

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RESULTS:

Singapore 42-31 Republic of Ireland (HT 22-15)

Sri Lanka 52-76 Papua New Guinea (HT 30-38)

Singapore 'A' 50-53 United States of America (HT 21-31)

REMAINING FIXTURES:

Date	Time	Fixtures		
2 nd December Monday	3.00pm	Sri Lanka	V	USA
	5.00pm	Rep of Ireland	V	Uganda
	7.00pm	Singapore	V	Papua New Guinea
3 rd December Tuesday	3.00pm	Uganda	V	Papua New Guinea
	5.00pm	USA	V	Rep of Ireland
	7.00pm	Singapore	V	Sri Lanka
4 th December Wednesday	3.00pm	Papua New Guinea	V	USA
	5.00pm	Rep of Ireland	V	Sri Lanka
	7.00pm	Uganda	V	Singapore
5 th December Thursday	Off Day			
6 th December Friday	3.00pm	Papua New Guinea	V	Rep of Ireland
	5.00pm	Sri Lanka	V	Uganda
	7.00pm	USA	V	Singapore
7 th December Saturday	1.00pm	5 th	V	6 th
	3.00pm	3 rd	V	4 th

	5.00pm	1 st	V	2 nd
	6.30pm	Closing Ceremony		

Current World Rankings (as of 4th Nov 2013)

Papua New Guinea – 18th

Republic of Ireland – 28th

Singapore – 21st

Sri Lanka – 23rd

Uganda – (No world ranking currently due to lack of international exposure)

United States of America – 19th

About Netball Singapore:

Netball Singapore is the national body for netball in Singapore. This well-established organisation has progressed dramatically since it commenced in 1962. It has become a professionally run National Sport Association which generates a proportion of its expenditure through sponsorship and other streams of revenue-generation. The association supports 68 multi-team club members and over 330 schools have netball in their curriculum.

Netball Singapore's mission is to encourage, promote and develop netball in Singapore. Singapore successfully hosted the World Netball Championships in July 2011 and has been awarded the rights to host the Asian Netball Championships in 2014. The National Team are currently ranked 21st in the World following their success at the 2012 Asian Championships where they were crowned champions for the second time in their history.

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