

Home Nations Swansea 15th & 16th August 2009

Senior Squad Report

EPA 1	R King	N Phillips	M Whatley	M Shrimpton
EPA 2	M Tull	M Slater	H Ash	A Odell
EPA 3	T Bingham	P Bingham	G Durrant	G Fletcher
EPA 4	R Patterson	J Inglis	M Robertshaw	
EPA 5	G Booth	C Watkins	S Doble	
EPA 6	E Jones	J Sewll	T Gates	S Zimmerman
EPA 7	P Bonnet	D Mason	B Stote	
EPA 8	S Golder	F Golder	G Elcome	K Elcome

Head of Delegation: Mike Pegg
Squad Manager: Richard Baker

The Home Nations 2009 was opened by the Mayor of Swansea, who gave a short speech of welcome and he then threw the first boule. Tony Smith, President of the Welsh PA also welcomed everybody and then proceedings were underway.

The terrain had been prepared from an old piece of waste ground in front of the Premier Inn. It was a mixture of lumps and bumps with a variety of different surfaces from small gravel to bare stones. It looked quite daunting and so it turned out to be.

The first round for England could not have been better; a 7-1 score line (this was to change to 8-0 later on, but a scorecard was incorrectly signed for and until the organisers agreed to reverse the result, the score would stand).

We beat the Scots 4-0 and the Welsh 3-1, with Wales beating Scotland 4-0; it was the foundation that we would have hoped for and be able build upon. The terrain was proving to be as much of a challenge as our opponents. A number of teams had to battle hard against the terrain and it was a result of the players temperament that they were to largely able overcome this obstacle and achieve this outstanding start.

England	4
Scotland	0

England	3
Wales	1

Wales	4
Scotland	0

Due to the inclement weather, games were started as soon as both teams were available. This meant there were delays for some teams and rushed breaks between games for others. However, everyone accepted that this was the best option in the circumstances and soldiered on.

The second round was not quite as successful for us and round one. With Wales again beating Scotland 4-0 it was going to be an uphill struggle to maintain our lead. The team were only able to draw 2-2 with both Wales and Scotland. England 1 and 2 lost to 9 and 12 respectively and the closeness of the result was indicative of the standard of opposition that we faced. However, with the Wales team continuing to beat the Scotland team convincingly, there was no lead for England to take into round 3.

England	2	6
Scotland	2	2

England	2	5
Wales	2	3

Wales	4	8
Scotland	0	0

Overall Scores	England	11
	Wales	11
	Scotland	2

Round 3 was much more competitive from the England team. We were fortunate the Scots drew with the Welsh 2-2. We beat both Wales and Scotland 3-1 to take a 3 point lead was into the fourth round. In this round England 4 inflicted the only defeat of the weekend for Wales 1; a resounding 13-4 win.

England	3	9
Scotland	1	3

England	3	8
Wales	1	4

Wales	2	10
Scotland	2	2

Overall Scores	England	17
	Wales	14
	Scotland	5

Round 4 was an evenly contested affair with all the results going 2-2, so no increase in the lead for the England team. Notable result of the round fell to the Scotland 1 team who beat Wales 2 13-10. It was however; at this point we were advised of the incorrect scorecard from round 1. Mike and I approached the organisers and discussed the situation, but we did not hold out much hope of having the score reversed.

Although, it was a genuine mistake, this was an International competition and players should check and double check the scorecards before presenting them to the officials.

England	2	11
Scotland	2	5

England	2	10
Wales	2	6

Wales	2	12
Scotland	2	4

Overall Scores	England	21
	Wales	18
	Scotland	9

Round 5 was disappointing for the team with only 3 wins overall. A 2-2- result against Scotland was the best aspect, but losing 3-1 to Wales was only tempered by the fact that Wales and Scotland 2-2. It was one the occasions that the team were grateful to Scotland as it lessened the impact of a bad result. The lead was cut to just 1 and with a terrain that could be cruel and kind in equal measures, this was not a comfortable situation to be in.

England	2	13
Scotland	2	7

England	1	11
Wales	3	9

Wales	2	14
Scotland	2	6

Overall Scores	England	24
	Wales	23
	Scotland	13

The final round of the day was one of the best rounds of the whole weekend for the England team. Wins of 3-1 against both Wales and Scotland were a fantastic achievement. This was topped by Scotland beating Wales 3-1 in this round giving some breathing space for the following day.

England	3	16
Scotland	1	8

England	3	14
Wales	1	10

Wales	1	15
Scotland	3	9

Overall Scores	England	30
	Wales	25
	Scotland	17

Overnight the individual team results were as follows:

	Wins	For	Against	Diff
EPA 1	2	57	66	-9
EPA 2	2	62	62	0
EPA 3	2	46	67	-21
EPA 4	4	66	51	15
EPA 5	5	69	47	22
EPA 6	5	72	35	37
EPA 7	4	65	48	17
EPA 8	6	78	51	27
Totals	30	515	427	88

From these results it was clear that the top 3 England teams were having to battle hard against determined opposition, whatever their relative position in their respective squads. EPA 8 had a fantastic day winning all their matches; unfortunately they were to come back down to earth the following day. (EPA 6 also won all their matches, but only after their incorrect score was credited back overnight)

Sunday dawned with a slight improvement in the weather and some welcome news regarding the incorrect scorecard. The organisers had agreed to reverse the score and award England their win, so the revised totals had England with 31 wins, Wales 24 and Scotland improving to 17 wins.

With the news that we had been successful in retrieving an important win, the teams took to the terrain with a reminder to ensure that this did not happen again. The organisers would not look on a second misdemeanour in such a favourable manor. A 7 point lead was never going to be a comfortable position to be in and everyone was out to achieve every win possible.

Round 7 saw England beat Scotland 4-0, but losing to Wales 3-1 and with Wales beating Scotland 3-1 the lead was cut to just 4 points. England 7 were desperately unlucky to lose 12-13 to Wales 5, but it is games like this that we needed to win.

England	4	20
Scotland	0	8

England	1	16
Wales	3	12

Wales	3	18
Scotland	1	10

Overall Scores		
England		36
Wales		30
Scotland		18

The whole team were becoming more and more tense as the rounds went by, everyone wanted to know how we had done in the last round and what the points difference was. There was a determination on all the players that England was not going to lose the Home Nations and that they were up for the challenge.

In round 8 both England and Wales won 5 games each. England drew 2-2 with Scotland and beat Wales 3-1. But with Wales beating Scotland 4-0 no advantage was gained by either side. It was becoming clear that although Scotland might not win the competition, they could have a massive impact on who did. Taking games from either England or Wales was swinging the balance from England to Wales and back again.

England	2	22
Scotland	2	10

England	3	19
Wales	1	13

Wales	4	22
Scotland	0	10

Overall Scores		
England		41
Wales		35
Scotland		20

Round 9 saw Wales gain 2 more matches back. With England only achieving 2-2 draws against Scotland and Wales, Wales took full advantage beating Scotland 4-0.

England	2	24
Scotland	2	12

England	2	21
Wales	2	15

Wales	4	26
Scotland	0	10

Overall Scores	England	45
	Wales	41
	Scotland	22

Round 10 saw some pivotal matches with results that would affect the final outcome and fortunately these went the way of England. EPA 3 had been struggling all day to find their first win and after a titanic battle finally overcame Wales 7-13. It was just reward for their perseverance and persistence, as they had been on the point of despair, but with support of the team they battled through. A 3-1 win against both Wales and Scotland was made even better as Scotland took 2 point off Wales.

A decisive lead was being built up through sheer determination, effort and hard slog.

England	3	27
Scotland	1	13

England	3	24
Wales	1	16

Wales	2	28
Scotland	2	12

Overall Scores	England	51
	Wales	44
	Scotland	25

Round 11 was good and bad in equal measure. A 3-1 win against Wales was countered by a 3-1 loss to Scotland and again it was the close results that turned the tables. A loss to 12, 2 losses to 11 and further loss to 10 showed how close the games were. Scotland taking another 2 games from Wales helped our situation and improved the overall lead to 8 points, just 1 away from victory.

The wins against Wales were effectively counting double at this stage of the competition, preventing Wales from closing the gap between the teams.

England	1	28
Scotland	3	16

England	3	27
Wales	1	17

Wales	2	30
Scotland	2	14

Overall Scores	England	55
	Wales	47
	Scotland	30

The final round was another nervous affair. Wales knowing that they had to pull out all the stops to beat England. The England teams were told to concentrate and win to ensure victory.

Although there were early wins from EPA 4 and EPA 3 to secure the title, the teams that were still playing were giving their all in an immense effort to maximise the difference in the wins column. In the end it was not the best round of the weekend with only 3 wins overall. A 2-2 draw against Scotland and a 3-1 loss to Wales was the best the team could do. It was however enough and the waves of relief that swept over the team were visible to all.

England	2	30
Scotland	2	18

England	1	28
Wales	3	20

Wales	3	33
Scotland	1	15

Overall Scores	England	58
	Wales	53
	Scotland	33

Summary

Overall England beat both Wales and Scotland, but the result of the competition was kept on a knife edge by the greater number of wins achieved by Wales over Scotland. It is difficult to pinpoint why the England teams did not achieve that same margin of victory over Scotland, certainly there were no visible signs of complacency from any of the teams.

On Sunday Wales won more matches than England 29-27 and this was a factor in keeping the scores as close as they were. Scotland won 17 on Saturday and 16 on Sunday, but the games taken from England were crucial. Although, Wales did return the compliment to a degree by taking games from Wales at equally important times.

The terrain with its variable bounce kept everyone on their toes and it was a real test of talent, technique and temperament.

The MC may wish to consider appointing more than 1 manager for the senior squad for future Home Nations. It was impossible to try and support more than 4 teams per round. That coupled with also trying to give the junior teams adequate attention as well, proved very demanding.

I was proud for all the teams and would like to express my thanks to them all for the huge efforts that they all contributed. My thanks also to Mike, who saw lots and said enough, but was discrete, efficient and hugely supportive to me, in my first team manager role.

Richard Baker
England Squad Manager
Home Nations 2009