By Kendall Dacey

The New York Athletic Club’s Women's Water Polo team traveled to the Golden State May 19th & 20th to defend last year’s title at the 3rd Annual Sonoma Open Water Polo Tournament that featured the top water polo clubs at the Nation.  Kelly Eaton (Stanford), Danielle Ingram (University of Hawaii) and Phoebe Champion (Princeton) represented the local AC contingent.  Joining the New York squad in California were 2009 World Champion Tanya Gandy, U.S. Open high-scorer Anne Belden, former Olympian Coralie Simmons, 2011 World University Games silver medalist Leah Robertson, 2010 World League Champion Emily Feher and California-Berkeley standout Melissa Wheeler.

In the opening game, NYAC competed against Team Riptide from Huntington Beach, CA, and dominated the game from start to finish winning with a final score of 17-4.  The combination of Simmons’s whole-set steals and Gandy’s fast breaks paralyzed Riptide offensive plays from the very first quarter.  Later that day, NYAC matched up against the host team, Sonoma, and prevailed with a convincing win, 20-3.  Earning a commanding lead in the first half, AC players were able to rehearse new offensive plays in the second half that utilized Belden’s quick drives into 2-meter with a back-door release to wily left-hander Champion for goals.  San Diego’s OMBAC was the final game of the day.  With only two subs for the entire tournament, the NYAC women relied heavily on the defensive expertise of goalies Feher and Ingram to prevent OMBAC offense from capitalizing on open shots. The NYAC finished the game with yet another win, 14-4.

Sunday morning left one final hurdle for the NYAC women to jump over to win the Sonoma Open Tournament title for the second time in as many years, against the arch-rival Olympic Club. The Winged Foot women battled the entire game and finished on top with a deeply gratifying win, 10-8.  Attackers Robertson, Eaton and Wheeler led the team in forced ejections, open counter attacks and a steals.   Outstanding contributions from Feher at the goal, and impeccable defense Gandy and Champion also proved to be key factors to the success in the final game.

Hopefully the weekend’s results act as a precursor to the final challenge of the summer: U.S. Open of Water Polo in Irvine, California from July 20th through 22nd.  With coaches Mike Judge and Peter Felvegi at the helm, NYAC Women’s Water Polo is poised to bring another consecutive Championship Title back to the New York AC.

In other exciting news, United States Water Polo has announced the final roster for the London Olympics with six NYAC women making the final cut. Donning the red, white and blue later this summer will be: goal keeper and 2011 FINA Athlete of the Year, Betsey Armstrong, 2000, 2004 and 2008 Olympian Heather Petri, all-around player Lauren Wenger, attackers Courtney Mathewson and Kelly Rulon as well as defender Jessica Steffens.  2009 Stanford standout, Lauren Silver, was also named to the Olympic roster as an alternate.  Olympic water polo coverage runs July 29ththrough August 12th so be sure to follow this outstanding US National team as they attempt to improve upon their silver medal from the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

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