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**For Immediate Release: July 31, 2017**

## **Yale Goes Down Under for Field Hockey and Fun**

*By Jessica Barnett, Yale Assistant Coach*

As a coaching staff, it is important to us that our student-athletes have the opportunity to experience field hockey in other parts of the world. To get this more worldly view of our sport, every four years we are fortunate enough to take a team trip abroad. The destination this year was Australia with stops in Sydney, Brisbane, and the Gold Coast. We chose Australia for its rich field hockey tradition, and summer weather we'd been lacking in the winter months on the East Coast. This was the first time most of our student-athletes traveled to Australia (and first time on a flight over 10 hours). Despite the long trip over, we're certain they'd tell you it was worth it.

The level of play was one of the reasons why we chose Australia. Field hockey is second nature to the communities, so clubs are filled with elite players. Children start playing with their parents at a young age and it really becomes a life-long involvement.

The first highlight of the trip's field hockey aspect was having the opportunity to meet Kieran and Blake Govers. This wasn't planned, or part of our trip itinerary. We were fortunate to be in the same place at the same time. The experience really showed the student-athletes what it's like to be in a place where field hockey is such a prominent sport. At this point we thought nothing could top our meet and greet with the Olympians, so we were again surprised when we found out the location of our next game: The Sydney Olympic Park Hockey Center (where the 2000 Olympics took place). Although the stands weren't as full as they were during the Olympics, it was still special for the girls to see a stadium that could hold thousands of people that watch the sport they play.

As we moved north from Sydney up to Brisbane, the competition more than exceeded our expectations. The tough part about going abroad is the level of play and figuring out how to match up. It was especially tough to get full numbers this time of year, as most Australians were taking summer holidays. We weren't disappointed when we showed up to play the University of Queensland. With a brand new turf facility, Yale was the first team to ever play a game against the University here. After two very hard fought battles with the Queensland team, we came out with a tie and a loss. Although the results weren't necessarily

wins, that didn't take away from what we were able to learn from those games. If you talk to the coaching staff, they would tell you that having these games was the best kind of competition.

There weren't expectations going in, and the student-athletes were able to enjoy playing. We didn't have the luxury of watching film or knowing our opponent. We spent our practice time focusing on ourselves, and how we needed to play. Despite not getting a win, this was some of the best field hockey we had seen our student-athletes play up to this point.

Our last stop on the trip was the Gold Coast. The coaching staff will be the first to tell you they weren't expecting the same caliber of talent here. The Gold Coast, also known as "Surfers Paradise" is just that. It's a surf town, with tourist shops, loads of hotels, and beaches that stretch for miles. However, if you venture 15 minutes away from this paradise, you come across the Super Sports Center, which will be the location for Commonwealth Games in 2018. To note, this facility was gorgeous.

Not only did we come across our toughest competition on the trip, but the toughest competition ever faced period. They had a couple of athletes on their roster working within the national team, so it was a level that our girls had not seen before. Despite this, our team did a great job of rising to the occasion and refusing to quit. We ended up dropping both our games here, but continued to improve as a whole. Again, it was these tougher games where we felt that we made the most strides as a team.

This trip wasn't all field hockey, there were some incredible off-the-pitch moments as well. While in Sydney, we toured the Oprah House, walked across the Sydney Harbor Bridge, and took a coastal walk from Bondi Beach. On our way out of Sydney, we made a stop to hike through the Blue Mountains. This rugged region just west of Sydney was filled with stunning views and waterfalls.

In Brisbane, we explored King George Square and took boats down the Brisbane River to get a waterfront view of the city. We also made a day stop at the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary, where many of the girls (and staff) got to hold koalas in their arms. But the most memorable experience was from the Gold Coast. We had the privilege of really acting like locals, and got surf lessons in "Surfers Paradise."

Our last stop of the trip was a hike to Byron Bay, which our players might tell you was one of the most beautiful spots they have ever seen. We were definitely very lucky to be able to take part in so much during the course of our trip. Our student-athletes got to experience high-level field hockey in another part of the world, and experience a place that most of them had never been before. In the short two weeks, we took advantage of every day and really had the experience of a lifetime while in Australia.