

## Scotland in South Africa

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Scotland were really pleased to be able to travel out to South Africa recently. The late withdrawal of 3 other Nations meant that the scheduled Commonwealth Championships were, in effect, cancelled and the Scotland squad who had organised their flights and accommodation months in advance could well have been left high and dry. Fortunately for us, the South African Korfball Federation were aware that we were committed to travelling out to South Africa and made arrangements for us to compete in their Regional Championships, which were being held outside, during the day and to play 3 International matches in the evenings.

The squad all travelled out to South Africa at various times, and the majority of us met up at Johannesburg airport on Saturday. We were met by Chris Theyse, the secretary general of the SAKF, and were transported over to Pretoria. As the tournament was not due to start until Monday, the SAKF had arranged for us to be taken to a safari park on the Sunday, which meant an early start (well by everyone except the people who had to be woken up...) and a 2 hour drive to Pilansberg Safari Park. The tournament began on Monday morning with the opening ceremony. Senior and Junior teams from all korfballing Regions in SA were in attendance along with the National team and the Scotland squad. For me, this was the point when I realised how pleased the SAKF were that we had taken the time to organise and commit ourselves to travelling to South Africa. The week showed us what a huge amount of preparation had been done for the Commonwealths and for my part I was glad that it wasn't totally in vain and I was happy that the Scotland team had committed themselves to supporting korfball within the Commonwealth and South Africa. The regional tournament went well for Scotland, the players started to come together as a team and a definite improvement in play could be seen as the week progressed. Wins over Gauteng East (8-4), Barbarians (11-6) KwaZuluNatal A (8-6), Gauteng North B (7-5) Sedibeng (6-4) and KWZ B (13-3) and 1 loss to reigning regional champions Gauteng North A (9-6), whose region contains more players than the whole of Scotland lead to a successful but tiring week, adding in some training sessions with ex- Belgium coach Daniel de Rudder, who used to coach Scotland's Wim Chalmet when he was a junior as well as 3 International Matches led to some tired korfball players. The international matches were much harder than the Regional tournament. The first match, against the Senior side was an amazing experience. The squad ran out to massive cheers from a crowd of around 300 people. Watching the team line up against South Africa, and hearing the anthems being played and taking in the atmosphere really made the importance of the trip, both for us and the South African team, sink in. For many squad members, this was their first International experience and the team started off in a tentative fashion. South Africa took a 2 goal lead before Scotland got out of the starting blocks. However, players gradually got over their nerves and goals from Anneli Mathew, Clive Minshull, Wim Chalmet, Tamara Burnell and Duncan MacLachlan meant that the team gathered momentum and by half time the score was 7-15 South Africa. Unfortunately during the 2nd half, Scotland were unable to build on the first half and only scored 2 more goals &ndash; one an amazing long shot from Daniel Hesford &ndash; to end the game 23-9. More importantly than the score was the experience the team had gained playing against a squad of a much higher level than any team they had played before. The South African team and spectators were very complementary about the squad performance and we looked forward to narrowing the scoreline in the next matches.

The next night, Scotland lined up alongside the Under 23 National team, which is preparing for the Championships in Chinese Taipei. Scotland was the quicker team out the blocks this time and build up a 3 goal cushion with goals from Clive Minshull & Duncan MacLachlan. South Africa replied with 2 goals before Dan Pratt stepped up to convert a penalty, leaving the South African team to reply with 1 more goal. Half time score 4-3 to Scotland. The 2nd half began with several changes in the South Africa line up and some good long shooting meant that the South African team took the lead for the first time. Despite some excellent play and goals from Anneli Mathew and Duncan MacLachlan, Scotland were unable to fight back and South Africa ran out the winners 9-6. The final international match was a repeat of Scotland vs the South African Senior squad. Despite some much improved play by the Scotland team, the South Africans had appeared to find their shooting boots and ran out winners 31-10. The Scotland team has shown dramatic improvement over the time in South Africa. The sheer volume of game time and match experience has proved invaluable to us and will stand us in good stead as we build up to our next competition in the Netherlands in November. The whole squad is incredibly grateful to the SAKF, the South Africa National teams and to the other participants at the tournament. We had an amazing experience &ndash; for me it was better than anything I had imagined and we come away from the tournament as a united squad. For me, the week could be summed up by the message from the secretary general of the SAKF, Chris Theyse: 'Although you are here to participate in a competitive environment, and winning is important, the most lasting impression that we should take home with us after the tournament is the enjoyment we get from attending.' I definitely enjoyed being in South Africa, and I look forward to meeting the South African teams again in the future.