



2009 FIRS WORLD INLINE HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP – VARESE, ITALY JUNE 29 – JULY 4 WOMEN’S TEAM USA – IMPRESSIONS AND EXPRESSIONS

GEORGE PICKARD – USARS Inline Hockey Committee Chairman: “This was likely one of the finest years for the USA Women’s Team comparing it to all seven previous FIRS Women’s World Inline Hockey Championships. Jeff Prime, American coach for all eight teams was given perhaps his most difficult assignment for 2009. He dealt with an abbreviated roster for the world championships in Varese, Italy, because of financial restrictions created by the poor state of current economies in the world and USA in particular. In addition, he had a team where the majority of players were not only young, but for the most part had little experience in international competition. Coach Prime, whose record shows that he is accustomed to fielding successful women’s teams at world championships, welded together his 7 newcomers and 4 returning players from last year’s third place finish, into a formidable defense and scoring machine that returned the USA women again to World Championship Gold Medal status. This was, by any measure of judgment, a bravura accomplishment, both for coach and players, and indeed a fortuitous one for the USA record books.”

“I was not present at the 2009 FIRS World Inline Hockey Championships for the first time in its 15 year history because of my recent retirement from FIRS. In undertaking the task of documenting the incredible achievements of USA teams during this summer’s world championships in Varese, Italy, I solicited comments from players and coaches to provide insight into the basis for their extraordinary success in overcoming pregame predictions of doom. Two common threads strung together the responses from both coach and players describing the magic responsible for the USA Team’s triumph over the obstacles which most prophets predicted would hamper their return to World Championship gold medal status. First, there was common agreement that Coach Jeff successfully convinced them that they could win if they supported one another, which then resulted in phase two, the bonding of veterans and novices into a formidable and unselfish team. I felt that the hockey public needed to hear in their own words how this occurred, not only to better appreciate the achievement of those young women, but to also use their example for others hockey ambitions.”

JEFF PRIME – TEAM USA COACH – Long Beach, CA explains: “Talking to the team before our first pool game against Canada, which turned out to also be the opening game of the Championship, I told them that the pools are not as important to the final outcome as the single-elimination medal games will be, since pool wins are only used to position opponent teams in the medal round. I said it did not matter if we finished first or second in our pool, because in the many years that I have done this, I knew who the top four teams were and that the semi-final game is the one that will really matter. This victory gets you into the gold medal game. I told them that every one would play and the goalies would evenly split the games regardless of the score. At half time we were up 2 - 0 against Canada as the result of goals by first year players Kourtney Kunichika and Laura Veharanta. Beginning the second half, we switched goalies and kept running all lines and won by a score of 5 - 1. The margin of victory truly amazed me. I was really shocked because Canada had Keely Brown in the net, who collectively may have given up only 6 goals against us in 5 years, again being supported by her usual array of talented team mates.”

“The rest of the round robin went as anticipated. The USA team got successfully by Spain in the Quarter-finals with a score 3 – 0. As a result, we faced France in the Semi-final, with Canada being matched against the Czechs in the first game of the semi-final. This proved to be a most competitive game, going into triple OT with Czech ultimately winning 5 – 4 over the Canadians. Our game against France I knew would be just as hard fought, since the French women play a very effective defensive style. This was the first time now that the USA team felt some nervousness in facing an opponent. We controlled the puck most of the game outshooting them 37 to 11 but could not score. Neither could they. The game ended up scoreless, going into overtime. About half way thru the OT, the French took a penalty. The USA went to a box power play, putting two girls in front of the net to screen the goalie and taking our shots from the top. At 9:05 of overtime, during the power play, a shot rebounded to Catherine Santo and she put it in the net to win it for the USA, which was the only score of the game.”

“Now the USA women faced the Czech team for the Finals and the gold medal. The Czechs are the defending Champions after beating the Canadians last year and again this year in the Semi-finals. I felt we had a good chance. About half way thru the first period the Czech scored on one of our mistakes. At that point, I changed up the lines and shortened the bench. We scored with about 3 seconds remaining in the first period, evening up the score 1 – 1. That proved to be a big boost for our team’s confidence and in the second period the USA team was all over the Czechs, scoring two more goals to win 3 – 1. This was a sweet victory, coming in with a very young and inexperienced team, not expecting much, and then winning the Gold Medal.” **Right on, Jeff!**

LISA GIOVANELLI – Meridian, CT: 2002 graduate of Northeastern University. Sports played competitively: Ice Hockey (college), Inline Hockey, Softball and Soccer. Current occupation: Assistant Women’s Ice Hockey Coach at Quinnipiac University. She relates:”This was the 7th time I represented our country at the FIRS World Championship. I have seen the caliber of opposing teams get better every year. Unfortunately, poor economic conditions cut into the number of teams present this year, but we still had a great championship. Finland was the big surprise in Varese. This is their third appearance as part of the FIRS Championship and they have gotten better each time and gave the USA a tough game this year. Some other countries that continue to improve every year are Czechs, who we faced in the finals this year, and France who gave us our toughest game of the tournament. The Czechs and French are both extremely disciplined teams that are very well coached. France had their youngest team ever, which shows that they have a great future ahead of them. Their goalie, who we struggled to get anything past, was just 16 years old! But my favorite game of the tournament had to be our very first game which happened to be against Canada, our usual rival for the gold medal. And I can’t remember one game against the Canadians that had more than a one goal difference at the outcome. So, we were very excited when we pretty easily handled them 5 -1. Besides winning the gold medal, that would definitely be my highlight of the tournament.”

“I was very impressed with my team this year because of how young we were. In the past years we would only have 2 or 3 new players in any given year, but this year we had 7. And with our average age being 18 years old, this was definitely our youngest team ever. But they played great! This was especially true for our 2 new goalies, Amber Carey and Jetta Rackleff. They had some very big shoes to fill and they did it with poise and determination. They split the tournament evenly and made some big saves in the semis and finals. Amber made some huge saves in our OT win against France including 2 breakaways, and Jetta helped us hold on to our lead late in the game against Czech in the finals. Overall, I had another great experience being part of Team USA at the FIRS World Championships and I look forward to next year!”

MIRANDA VAN ATTA – Woodland, CA, Undergraduate at Woodland Community College majoring in Exercise Therapy. Skating since age 5. Home Club – Nor-Cal Indoor Sports Arena.

“Playing in the “Campionati Mondiali di Inline Hockey” in Varese, Italy has been one of my greatest life experiences, having been a part of Team USA now for three years. The team was much different compared to any other year; this year was the youngest team I have played with in a World Championship. We had some incredibly talented athletes that stepped it up when we needed them the most. We also had a very experienced coach who has been coaching Team USA for the past eight (plus) years, Jeff Prime. He was able to motivate the team, get us to do what he wanted, and did what he knew was best for our team. Our pool games were not much of a worry for us, but a good time for our team to begin bonding and get comfortable with each other on the floor.”

“However, playing against Team France in the Quarter Finals proved to be a nail biter, to say the least. Coming back from a heart breaking third-place in Germany in 2008, I have never wanted anything so bad but to win the Gold this year. One team mate that really impressed me was Laura Veharanta. She has some of the best hockey hands I have ever seen, I know she will continue to do well in college and hopefully in further inline hockey world championships. Another of our team leaders was Lisa Giovanelli. The C on her jersey didn’t make her our Captain but her actions as team leader did. She is an incredible hockey player and we were very lucky to have her as leader, but even more as a friend. The closing ceremonies were (almost) emotional for all of us. We were so happy and tired at the same time. All of the other teams were so gracious towards us and Italy as a whole gave us a warm welcoming. I will always remember the incredible trip and all of the great friendships I have created with my teammates and other’s from all over the world.”

CATHERINE SANTO - St. James, NY; Club: Team Revision, California. Has skated 10 years in competition, said: “When I was 8, my brother and cousin would play street hockey outside my house and they would always play one on one and would duck tape couch cushions to my legs because they never had a goalie. One day, I made my brother play goalie and I never looked back.” As a member of the 2009 FIRS Women’s USA team, I am proud to have been able to contribute year after year to this organization and be able to represent my country in World Competitions for the third year in a row. This summer in Varese, Italy, I was more ready than ever to step on the rink and regain our lost Championship title. My rookie year was in 2007, when the World Championships took place in Spain. I remember my nerves and butterflies and I am positive that a few of this year’s rookies felt the same. It was the youngest team of women that the USA has ever been brought to compete at Worlds and they obviously performed with great success. Neither of our goaltenders had ever experienced the FIRS International competition before and, if I hadn’t known that, I would have thought them to be veterans. The competition from other teams this year was very good and the championships were certainly not a walk in the park. I believe bringing a new group of young talented players contributed a great deal to the success we experienced.”

CHELSEI WELLS – Lakewood, Colorado. In fall will attend Colorado State University in Ft. Collins; she is Black Belt in Karate; has skated since 11 years old. Home Club is Colorado Mission Wolverines. “This year was my first year playing roller hockey in the World Championship. I was expecting to go and have an awesome time, but looking back on the experience, it is clear that it was beyond awesome; my expectations were far exceeded. I had a blast every second of every day, and can only hope that I will have this opportunity again. As an athlete, this experience, perhaps more than any other in my career of playing inline hockey, has firmed my commitment to be the best that I can be. As far as my teammates go, I was very impressed by all of them. They all are outstanding hockey players, and I am proud to have been chosen to be among them. It would be difficult for me to choose a single player that stood out above the rest, because each one was an exceptional player, with their own unique combination of talents and skills. The players who returned from the previous year's World Championship were very welcoming and supportive of all the rookies, including myself. I think a lot of our success was not only due to the fact that there were talented players on the team, but that we all had great chemistry on and off the rink.”

JETTA RACKLEFF – Bend, Oregon. Age 17, has been skating since age 4 and competing in inline hockey for 4 years as well as being a member of the J2 National Down Hill Skiing Team that recently trained during July/August in Chile. Plays the cello. Educational goal: Chemical Engineering. Club member COISC Bend Bullets and Tour Jaguars. “I really would like to see inline hockey grow enough for it to be in the Olympics. In Varese, Italy I played as one of the goalies for the USA Women's Team. The entire competition showed a very high caliber of play whether it was men's or women's. It was a whole different kind of play when we played teams from other countries. They had completely different styles of shooting or tactics which was a fun challenge to stop or read the play from other teams. When we first arrived, I was very impressed by the organization with our flights, hotel, food and transportation. It must have taken forever to book that many hockey players.”

“The rink was also just a 5 min walk away and town wasn't that far so it was easy to explore on foot. Despite it being deathly hot there, we practiced and played to the best of our ability. I don't think I have ever sweated that much playing hockey in my life, so it was very hot. When we began the games, the teams I was most impressed by were Finland, who we played in round robin, France, who we played in semis, and Czech, who we played in the finals. Goalie-wise, I was more impressed with Canada's and Czech's goalies that seemed to know their angles and other things very well and it was rewarding being put against some good competition in the goal. Playing in the final game was one of the most fun and biggest adrenaline rushes I've had and it was very rewarding when all the hard work paid off. As a team, we all seemed to gel really well. The girls in front of me wasted no time in getting down passing to each other and instinctively knowing where each other are. It was cool to watch us come together from everywhere, and in the short time that we were competing, they played as if they had been together for years. Team captains and the coaches I felt made responsible decisions and also made sure that everyone got a fair taste of World Championship action. Our winning goal in the semis was because of some good teamwork to make the extra pass for a good shot instead of being selfish and trying to score by themselves.”

AMBER CAREY – Livermore, California – Goalie: Plays both men and women's ice hockey; undergraduate at Sonoma State University as business major; plays roller hockey in university league and with Jawz Elite Roller Hockey Club in AIHL.

“I had an amazing experience at the world championships. Being able to represent the US and win the gold was a big accomplishment for our team. I thought we all worked well together and had a great team bonding, which helped us succeed to get the gold. I would like to see roller hockey continue to expand so it could someday become an Olympic sport.”

ARIANE YOKOYAMA – Van Nuys, California: Student at Rochester Institute of Technology on Ice Hockey Scholarship – Major is Medical Digital Sonography; Home Club – Reebok OC Blades (inline); skating since 4 years old. Ariane says “Playing in Italy was an amazing experience and one I'll never forget. I was excited but nervous to represent the USA, but thrilled we won the Gold. I think what made our team stand out was that we played well together as a whole rather than individually. We moved the puck and were able to run our breakouts throughout the entire tournament. I believe the thing that contributed to our success the most was that more than half the team had played with each other in the past. Lisa, Char and Miranda have been playing with each other for years. I've played ice with Laura and Allie since I was fourteen and roller with Kourtney since I was eight. Each of us knew how the others played which helped us read off each other and make plays easily. Also, we had great leadership by the older girls (Lisa, Char, Miranda), who had been on the team before. A big factor was our coach Jeff Prime. He is just my favorite coach and he knows the game, teams and knows how to coach girls to win! That is not an easy task, but he does it better than anyone I know.”

“The teams we faced were definitely a lot harder than I expected them to be. Each team had its own strengths: Canada moved the puck extremely well, Finland was aggressive, France was quick on the puck

and Czechs were just an all around great team. Hey, they were the defending World Champions...so that says it all! And who could argue with the great location? Italy...that's all that has to be said. My two greatest loves are hockey and food, and these Worlds had them both!"

FIRS 2009 WOMEN WORLD CHAMPIONS – TEAM USA

**#1 Amber CAREY-Goalie – Livermore, CA; #17 Allison ERA – Glendale, AZ;
#3 Lisa GIOVANELLI – Middletown, CT; #8 Kourtney KUNICHIKA – Westminster, CA; #6 Kelly McCORMACK –Nesconset, NY; #22 Charlotte NICHOLSON – Morrisville, NC; #27 Jetta RACKLEFF- Goalie – Bend, OR; # 9 Catherine SANTO – St. James, NY; #11 Miranda Van ATTA – Woodland, CA; #24 Laura VEহারANTA – LaVerne, CA; #70 Chelsi WELLS – Lakewood, CO; #4 Ariane YOKOYAMA – Van Nuys, CA; COACH – Jeff PRIME – Long Beach, CA; MANAGER – Charles SGRILLO – Philadelphia, PA**

2009 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL RESULTS:

- 1. USA – Gold**
- 2. CZECH REPUBLIC – Silver**
- 3. CANADA – Bronze**
- 4. France**
- 5. Spain**
- 6. Australia**
- 7. Finland**
- 8. Italy**

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