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**Thanks
for all your support
It's been a great first season !**

The Ascot Park Hotel Southern Steel's inaugural ANZ Championship season has produced it's fair share of challenges, excitement and thrilling, competitive netball. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who made it happen - especially our loyal supporters and sponsors.

We hope you'll keep checking our website as we'll be updating developments as we build towards an even better season in 2009 !

Match Report : Ascot Park Hotel Southern Steel vs Queensland Firebirds - July 6th, 2008
Steel 54, Firebirds 52

As the final whistle blew on the Ascot Park Hotel Southern Steel's inaugural ANZ Championship season on Sunday night, talk was already turning to next year's pursuit of the trans-Tasman silverware. "You can bet your bottom dollar it will be a lot different next year," Steel captain Jenny-May Coffin said.

A rocky start in the opening rounds certainly had the critics crawling out of the woodwork this year, but five wins from the last six games – including the scalps of competition leader Waikato/Bay of Plenty Magic and title contender the Melbourne Vixens – silenced them with a mouthful of humble pie.

While not keen to dwell on “the could of and the should of”, coach Robyn Broughton and Coffin conceded losing two winnable games against the LG Northern Mystics and the Skope Canterbury Tactix in May proved the downfall of Steel's playoff dream. “Our season could have been at least another game longer – but it's done and dusted,” Coffin said. “We're 6th and that's better than being 7, 8, 9 or 10.” Broughton agreed: “We're the second best New Zealand team and we bet the best New Zealand team.”

Sunday's 54-52 win over the Queensland Firebirds in Dunedin was a fitting finale for 2008 – one the Southerners never looked in danger of losing. In fact, Steel looked relaxed from the onset and never really asserted its dominance until forced to in the dying stages.

However, both Broughton and Firebirds counterpart Vicki Wilson lamented the physical nature of the game, with Broughton crediting the win to “perseverance under extreme pressure”. “There were two types of pressure out there – physical and mental – and I think we withstood it.”

When asked why teams struggle to win on the other side of the Tasman, Wilson said: “I don’t think the whistle stops blowing over here and it’s very hard to find your rhythm. “I think we did extremely well (tonight) in facing that type of adversity. I could cope with it if I was playing against a team of angels but it wasn’t angelic play out there.” Australian fans were used to a more open and fluent game of netball, she said. “People (in Australia) won’t tune in and watch this type of game.”

But the sellout 2900-strong Dunedin crowd was not complaining, especially as the Steel struck out to a 7-2 advantage in the opening stanza. As the Firebirds clawed their way back, Steel’s attack stepped it up a notch with four unanswered goals, aided by a more mobile Daneka Wipiiti creating good space in the shooting circle, despite the presence of young gun defender Laura Geitz.

Leading 15-14 at the break, Steel did an admirable job protecting its slim advantage with the Firebirds drawing level three times but denied the lead following classy intercepts by Katrina Grant and Megan Hutton respectively.

At 1.96m tall, Firebirds goal shoot Romelda Aiken is not much of a secret but the competition’s most prolific shooter is undoubtedly a weapon. Nailing all 19 of her shots in the first half, Aiken ended the match with an impressive 35 from 39.

Also shining in the shooting stakes and matching Aiken’s 89 percent accuracy was Steel goal attack Megan Dehn who secured a well-deserved Player of the Match award.

Down 26-29 at halftime, Wilson was forced to make an array of changes for the Firebirds, including introducing Janelle Lawson at goal attack. The move didn’t reap many benefits in the third quarter but started to pay dividends in the final spell. Lawson’s stronger presence on attack, combined with a stellar performance from Aiken, saw the Firebirds slot five in a row and draw level 48-48 with six minutes on the clock. But Lawson was left ruing her gusto when called for breaking and the Firebirds chance to snatch the lead was handed to the Steel, who never looked back.

The Steel players are now focused on a well-deserved break from the hectic training and playing schedule which has dominated their lives since February. For midcourt dynamo Liana Barrett-Chase, the off-season will bring its share of excitement after she announced her pregnancy on Sunday with her second child due in January. But whatever the timeout brings, after tasting netball’s new flagship competition you can guarantee the 2009 ANZ Championship will not be far from their minds.



We've got a great selection of photographs, courtesy of the Southland Times, showing the Southern Steel in action throughout the 2008 season on our Photo Gallery. [Click here](#) to take a look.

Bring on 2009 !

THE 2008 ASCOT PARK HOTEL SOUTHERN STEEL



Megan Dehn



Jenny-May Coffin



Megan Hutton



Jess Tuki



Juliana Naoupu



Daneka Wipati



Lisna Barrett-Chase



Wendy Telfer



Erika Burgess



Debbie White



Te Huinga Reo Selby-Fickit



Katrina Grant

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