

UNDER AN ORANGE SKY

The Story of the
Vitality Hockey Women's World Cup
London 2018



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1

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Imagery by Frank Uijlenbroek and Koen Suyk,
with additional photography from Rodrigo Jaramillo







Foreword by Crista Cullen

Former England and Great Britain defender and triple Olympian and medallist at the London 2012 (bronze) and Rio 2016 (gold) Olympic Games.

A World Cup, in any sport, is something truly special.

It provides the opportunity for the best of the best to leave absolutely everything on the field, a chance to showcase years of hard work and gut-wrenching fitness and gym sessions, where athletes have pushed their bodies to their physical limits to give themselves the chance to lift the World Cup trophy.

For two weeks over the summer of 2018, London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park was electric, bringing back wonderful memories for those lucky enough to have been present at the Olympic Games in 2012. The revamped Lee Valley Hockey & Tennis Centre enjoyed sell-out crowds, with more than 120,000 fans attending what was a spectacular Vitality Hockey Women's World Cup London 2018.

The action on the field contained all of the flair, skill and determination that you would expect, but with it came a huge amount of unpredictability. The pool stage was certainly nowhere near as straight forward as some of the higher-ranked teams would have either wanted or expected it to be, and failure to hit form in the pool phase left many big teams facing the dreaded cross-over play-off matches. While the cross-overs would prove to be a graveyard for some big-name teams, for the audiences in the stands and watching back home, these additional play-offs lifted the excitement to another level. The cross-over play-offs were followed by more all-or-nothing contests as the knock-out matches continued to produce one shock result after another.

No World Cup competition is without drama, elation and, inevitably, heartbreak, and this event had all of those elements in abundance. We all love an underdog and, in London, this was undoubtedly the Irish. It was the first time in 16 years that the Green Army had qualified for the World Cup, and, while their ambitions were clear, it was the smiles on the Irish players' faces and the way they went about their business that captured the imagination.

A lasting memory for me involved stalwart Ireland player Shirley McCay. The defender was hastily leaving the

field during one of the match intervals to join her fellow players for coach Graham Shaw's team talk. She was rudely interrupted by me, who, in my role working as a pitchside interviewer for host broadcaster BT Sport, thrust a microphone in her face and asked for her thoughts on the game. Ever the professional, she gave her answer, explaining about Ireland needing to take their opportunities while also being dogged in defence. My follow-up question related to the fact that moments earlier she had taken a ball to her cheek. The incident had drawn a huge gasp from the crowd, but McCay simply shook it off and got on with her job. Her smiling response to my question – which gave a good indication of how relaxed both McCay and her Irish team-mates were feeling in London – was: 'It just adds to the beauty.'

While it could be argued that lack of expectation played a big role, Ireland undoubtedly proved their worth many times over as they navigated their way through the competition. They answered all of the questions posed by the opposition teams and absolutely earned the right to compete in the World Cup Final.

Despite all of the shocks and surprises, nobody can dispute that this tournament was illuminated by the sheer brilliance of the team dressed in orange. Through their clinical nature and sublime skills, the Netherlands were sensational from start to finish as they claimed an eighth World Cup victory and completed a successful defence of the title that they won on home soil in The Hague in 2014. With 35 goals scored and only three conceded, the team coached by Alyson Annan truly stamped their class all over the World Cup in 2018, with only Australia getting near them before going down in a dramatic shoot-out. Yes, the fairy-tale story was undoubtedly Ireland's staggering journey to the final. But, ultimately, this World Cup was about excellence rising to the top. The Netherlands showed yet again that when it comes to top-class hockey, they have found a winning formula.





Frank Uijlenbroek



Koen Suyk



Rodrigo Jaramillo

About the Authors and Photographers

Under An Orange Sky: The story of the Vitality Hockey Women's World Cup London 2018 is the second collaboration between hockey journalists Richard Stainthorpe and Sarah Juggins. The two authors are uniquely placed as international hockey writers to tell the story of the Vitality Hockey Women's World Cup from an international perspective, due to their respective roles within the International Hockey Federation (FIH). Both Richard and Sarah write regular articles about teams from around the world and so have an in-depth understanding of the international hockey scene.

Richard Stainthorpe works for the FIH as writer, editor and media operations coordinator. He has covered many international events, including four hockey World Cups, two Olympic Games and numerous other international hockey tournaments.

Sarah Juggins is a freelance writer, working for the FIH, the Pan American Hockey Federation and Planet Hockey. She ran the Hockey Olympic News service at London 2012 and covered the 2014 men's and women's hockey World Cups in The Hague.

The majority of the images that appear in this book were taken by Dutchmen **Frank Uijlenbroek** and **Koen Suyk**, two of the world's leading hockey photographers. It is the second project in which Frank and Koen have worked in collaboration with Sarah and Richard, having also supplied the breathtaking imagery that featured in *The History Makers – How Team GB Stormed to a First Ever Gold in Women's Hockey*, which was named Thomson Reuters Illustrated Book of the Year at the Sports Book Awards 2018.

Frank has travelled the globe taking images of the sport, supplying various agencies, newspapers and major online news outlets as well as national associations, continental federations and the International Hockey Federation. He has almost 30 years' experience in the business and was on hand to capture the Beijing 2008, London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Frank is the owner of the FFU and World Sport Pics photo agencies.

Koen is a veteran of eight Olympic Games and has captured some of hockey's most iconic moments. Over a 40-year career he has earned a reputation as a world-class photographer working for agencies such as Reuters, ANP and ANEFO (Amsterdam). At the Rabobank Hockey World Cup in 2014 in The Hague, the Royal Dutch Hockey Association (KNHB) honoured Koen by creating a public display of some of his finest images. A famous shot of Alex Danson in full flight was named Best Photo at the 2015 EuroHockey Championships in London.

Frank and Koen are joined on this project by talented Argentinian photographer **Rodrigo Jaramillo**, who has also contributed some terrific images, thanks to his work with the World Sport Pics photo agency.

Acknowledgements

Although assembled by a small team of writers and photographers, a project like this is not possible without the assistance of a great many other people. We would like to thank all of the athletes and coaching staff for speaking to us before, during and after the Vitality Hockey Women's World Cup London 2018. In addition, the following people also offered invaluable help.

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Dedications

The authors and photographers would like to dedicate this book to the Hockey Makers, England Hockey's extraordinary army of volunteers. Your passion, dedication and sheer love of the sport made every single day an utter joy. You made it happen – thank you.



Getting Ready for
the First Whistle



A Hockey Maker brings
rhythm to proceedings as the
crowd watch the action.
// Rodrigo Jaramillo

Getting Ready for the First Whistle

Every game is going to be like a final to us,' were the prophetic words of Ireland's head coach Graham Shaw as he prepared his assorted team of doctors, lawyers, physiotherapists and students for the biggest challenge of their lives, taking their place at the top table of hockey, the Vitality Hockey Women's World Cup London 2018.

Equally prescient was Spain's head coach Adrian Lock, as he warned: 'Prepare for a few surprises.'

At this crazy, anything-goes, prepare-for-the-unexpected, dramatic and tear-inducing World Cup, there was no such thing as a certainty. As World Cups go, this one had it all. High-ranked teams fell by the wayside, reputations were ignored and accepted practices turned on their heads as the form book was torn up in front of the huge crowds that flocked to the Lee Valley Hockey & Tennis Centre on a daily basis. Every day something happened that caused people to shake their heads in disbelief. It was that kind of event.

From the first sighting of the red, white and blue smoke emitted as the Red Arrows flew past to the heart-



Las Leonas's loyal fans turned Lee Valley into a South American style fiesta. // Rodrigo Jaramillo



Fans of Belgium's Red Panthers, accompanied by their resident drummer, made themselves heard throughout. // Rodrigo Jaramillo



The Red Arrows, the display team of the Royal Air Force, were the highlight of a spectacular opening to the Vitality Hockey Women's World Cup. // Ned Dawson / Planet Hockey

wrenching sight of World Cup hopefuls departing the competition earlier than expected; from the ever-ready smiles of the volunteer army of Hockey Makers to the swathes of blue and white-daubed Argentina fans who brought their own South American flavour to London's East End; from the mesmerising chanting of the Belgium fans, with their accompanying drum beat, to the never-faltering smiles of the Japanese team and their supporters. This was a major international sporting spectacle at its scintillating, dramatic, culturally-diverse best.

And yet, in the final analysis, calm and order was restored in the shape of the outstanding champions. If this event had been a firework display, the show's organisers would have been praised for adding all sorts of flair and surprises in the lead-up to the grand finale. But when it came to it, they couldn't change the final act – yes, they could add more colour, sparkle and noise but the centrepiece, the pièce de résistance will always be the biggest, boldest and best firework in the collection. And in this case it came in the shape of the reigning champions and undisputed world number-one side, the Netherlands. The national flags and colourful kits representing the 16 nations all added colour and vibrancy to this corner of London, yet somehow the orange shirts and orange flags always caught the eye. When the Oranje took to the pitch, there were guaranteed moments of pure hockey magic, all orchestrated by the lead magician on the sideline.

But this is not just an account of one outstanding team. It is a story with two very different themes running through it. Yes, on the one hand, it is the story of how one of the greatest female players of all time has evolved



A double World Cup winner in her own right, Alyson Annan is now recognised as one of the world's top coaches. // Frank Uijenbroek



Vital to the whole event were the hard-working and professional army of volunteer Hockey Makers. // Rodrigo Jaramillo



London's Burning. As if the hot temperatures weren't enough, players ran out on to the pitch through an avenue of flames. // Frank Uijlenbroek

into one of the best coaches in the world and how, over the course of 20 months, she harnessed a group of exceptionally talented individuals and blended them into one compelling, efficient and supreme team that was, quite simply, a cut above the rest. That is the one storyline that followed the script completely.

The second story is the rumbustious, rollicking tale of the 'others', which has all the elements of a darn good yarn. The most unlikely results, the most dramatic endings, the tears, the joy, the heartbreak and the ecstasy. In a nutshell, it is the reason we all love a great sporting spectacle.

The 14th edition of the women's hockey World Cup was the first time that the competition had been held in London and the host national association, England Hockey, was determined to make it an event to remember. Ever since the London 2012 Olympic Games, and the huge success of the temporary Riverbank Arena as a venue, England Hockey had been working tirelessly to establish a recognised home base on the London Olympic site. The Lee Valley Hockey & Tennis Centre – situated a few hundred metres away from the site of the Riverbank Arena – is the



The Lee Valley Hockey & Tennis Centre has played host to a number of prestigious hockey events but the scale of the World Cup meant this was new territory. // Rodrigo Jaramillo

world-class legacy facility that was created after the Olympics had left town and, over the past six years had played host to the men's and women's 2015 EuroHockey Championships, the men's and women's 2016 Champions Trophy events and the men's 2017 Hockey World League Semi-Finals. At each of these events, the host nation honed its presentation skills, trained more of its huge volunteer workforce and fine-tuned its catering, entertainments and side shows until they were absolutely ready to welcome hockey's premium championship.

In a wonderful nod to the past, the host nation established a large spectator zone, known as Fan Central, on the exact site on which the Riverbank Arena had stood. As well as all of the retail and food outlets, a giant screen ensured that hockey was being watched in the exact place where the Netherlands, Argentina and Great Britain had famously claimed the respective gold, silver and bronze medals in 2012.

The stadium itself, which usually has a capacity of 3,000, more than trebled in size to over 10,000. In the weeks leading up to the event, east Londoners watched as a new, towering addition to the London skyline took shape. To sit at

the very top of the colossal West Stand, gazing at the pitch below gave the sensation of staring vertically down on to the field of play itself. If you took a minute to look away from the action, the top levels of this behemoth of a sports stand offered spectacular views of London's iconic skyline. Local people, who had previously had no interest in the sport, began to take note. By the time the first match started, the buzz surrounding hockey and the World Cup in and around Stratford and the other east London boroughs was there for all to experience.

And this was by no means a London-centric event. More than 750 hockey clubs from across the UK were represented at the World Cup. From club members and officials attending formal meetings, training sessions and workshops to whole blocks of seats adorned with flags carrying the names of clubs, this was an event which galvanised the grass roots hockey spectators and a fair few people new to the game. England Hockey's legacy of promoting the sport across the UK was there for all to see.



Travelling man: Roberto Carta had ensured Italy were prepared for World Cup action. // Rodrigo Jaramillo



The view from the West Stand. // Rodrigo Jaramillo

There were 16 teams participating in the Vitality Hockey Women's World Cup, with the group stages consisting of four pools of four. These pools had been established by the sport's world governing body, the International Hockey Federation (FIH), based on each team's position in the FIH Hero World Rankings as of 6 November 2017. The first-placed team in each pool qualified for the quarter-finals. The second- and third-placed teams played cross-over matches to earn their places in the quarter-finals, meaning they played one, extra, do-or-die match to try to secure a berth in the next round. For the fourth-placed team in each pool, it was an early exit – just three games in the World Cup and then home. This was a brand-new format which left little room for error.

In preparation for the World Cup, most teams had travelled the globe in the previous months. Japan, with Australian-born head coach Anthony Farry, had been jamming in as much experience of playing in Europe as was possible in the final weeks before the action began. They arrived in the Netherlands on 23 June and then went on a whirlwind tour, including a Four Nations event in Breda which ran alongside the Men's Rabobank Hockey Champions Trophy 2018, test matches against Ireland and a Three Nations event against China and Belgium.

Likewise, the lowest-ranked team in London, the Azzurre of Italy, also went on their pre-World Cup travels. Preparations in the lead-up to the World Cup included a number of international matches – against Scotland, Russia,

The four pools, with FIH Hero World Rankings (WR) at the time of the competition:

Pool A

Netherlands (WR:1)
China (WR:8)
Korea (WR:9)
Italy (WR:17)

Pool B

England (WR:2)
USA (WR:7)
India (WR:10)
Ireland (WR:16)

Pool C

Argentina (WR:3)
Germany (WR:6)
Spain (WR:11)
South Africa (WR:14)

Pool D

New Zealand (WR:4)
Australia (WR:5)
Japan (WR:12)
Belgium (WR:15)



Ireland's Anna O'Flanagan would make a big name for herself in London.
// Frank Uijlenbroek



The stage is set. // Frank Uijlenbroek

France, Germany, Ireland and Argentina. Roberto Carta, Italy's vivacious head coach, explained why: 'International competition against these teams is vital. In the World Cup my team will be playing top ten-ranked sides that have much more high-level playing experience. Any opportunity to play against other nations and experience different styles of play is vital if Italy is to hold its own.'

A final practice match in London saw Carta's team play Japan. Again, practice against higher-ranked opponents with differing styles was vital if Italy were to do well in a pool containing China and Korea, two teams with similar playing characteristics to Japan's Cherry Blossoms. It was also a chance for the players to realise the enormity of the occasion. With some training sessions closed to the public, even an empty stadium, with its rows and rows of seats that reach up into the sky, was enough to set a player's heart racing and the adrenaline pumping.

One team that received an unexpected boost to their pre-World Cup preparations was Ireland. Until May 2018, the Green Army had had no additional funding, so the chance to travel to play practice matches was close to non-existent. A last minute sponsorship deal with finance automation software provider SoftCo meant the team could spend the last few weeks before London playing test matches and training together. Up to that point, Ireland had essentially been a team of 'amateurs', although only in the financially supported sense of that word. When it came to making sacrifices for their sport and giving everything to the 'shirt', the entire team were fully signed up professionals.

That said, Ireland's progress in recent years, including narrowly missing out on qualification for the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, had been in some way attributable to the fact that several senior players had gained experience playing abroad, with the likes of Chloe Watkins, Nikki Evans and Anna O'Flanagan all representing high-profile clubs in the hockey hotbeds of Germany and Netherlands.

With Hockey Ireland's resources limited in the extreme, the players plying their trade in Ireland were doing so as a hobby, rather than as a professional career. The training windows Graham Shaw had with his squad in the months following qualification for the World Cup were short. The benefit of having a core group of players living and playing abroad, fully immersed in hockey on a full-time basis, was a crucial factor in adding an extra layer of experience, in both mental and psychological terms.

'You've seen that with players who have gone abroad in the last few years, even the conditioning aspect of it, just being able to eat when you need to eat, recover when you need to recover and not having to worry about getting up to go to work at 7am in the morning,' said Shaw. For the rest of his squad, getting a balance between going to work and training for hockey meant the Irish players arrived in London knowing that they had already achieved a huge amount simply by being there. How much further could their journey take them?

It was the question that the 16 coaches and their respective playing squads were all asking themselves as the final preparations drew to a close. They would soon know the answers.