

Wake up and smell the chlorine...

Text: Hettie de Villiers, Marlies Ross and Tatjana Schoenmaker

When I recently made a staff room announcement about two of our Grade 11 girls having been chosen to represent SA at the BHP AQUATIC SUPER SERIES In Perth, the news was met with broad smiles and proud oohs and ahs from the teachers. This was soon replaced by concerned looks as the teachers started writing down the dates that the two girls would be absent from school. *Can we get some extra time with them before they go?* The Maths teacher is always the first to ask. *What if they miss my test?* The new teacher's question is drowned by everyone assuring her that the swimmers will write when they come back. *Do they take their books with?* *Can we expect them to keep up while they are there?* Another new teacher – but the question is valid. *Can we expect them to do homework?* *Do they have time?*

I asked Marlies Ross and Tatjana Schoenmaker to keep a diary while they were there – to give us – and you – a closer look at what it's like to be part of Team South Africa, but still very much a learner at TuksSport High.

Diary of Marlies Ross in Australia

30 January 2014

07h00: My alarm goes off. With great difficulty I get out of bed. Feeling so tired - jet-lag! I grab all my stuff for a morning training session and leave for breakfast.

07h30: It's important to eat well so that I have enough energy for the session, so I have a good brekkie and grab a snack bar and fruit for afterwards. Time to catch the bus.

08h00: One the bus to school I see that everyone is still half asleep. The atmosphere is very dull on the long drive to the pool. I use the time to look at some beautiful scenery as we pass by places in Perth.

08h35: We arrive at the Sports Centre. I'm awestruck by its sheer size. I have to make my way past several Olympic sized pools on the way to the training pool! At the sight of the pools reality sinks in – time to get myself together and focus on the session. Training is tough. I'm physically exhausted and I have to keep on reminding myself to push through, to stay strong and remember what I was doing there.

11h50: We arrive at the hotel – luckily we're early and can catch lunch before the others arrive. With about 150 swimmers around, the food tends to disappear quickly!

12h30: I head up to get a half an hour massage with my physio, Grace. A light rub releases some

of the strain after a long flight and activates the muscles a bit – I feel much better afterwards.

13h00: At about 13h00 I head up to my room rather slowly. I have 3 hours all to myself. Time for some school work. I've worked out a daily homework schedule and force myself to stick to it – not always easy! I managed to work ahead in some subjects before we left, but there is still work to do. Today is Maths day. Have to keep Mrs. Joubert happy ☺.

13h50: Homework done, it's time to relax. A foam roller session and a long trigger point session give my muscles a wake-up call.

14h45: After that is done, I head to my bed for a 30 minute nap. It's all I need for my body to rebuild energy for the afternoon training session.

15h15: My alarm goes off. Energised and ready to work, I make my training drink and pack all the necessary items I need for practise. With enough time left, I quickly Skype my parents back in South Africa.

15h45: On the bus Coach Igor, calls me and we discuss what programme I have to do. We come to the conclusion that a pace set is in order.

16h20: We arrive at the pool. There are 5 teams participating and we only have the pool for about an hour. That gives me 10 minutes to stretch and get into the pool.

- 16h30: I dive in and am surprised to feel so good in the water. I do my usual gala warm-up: 400m free-back by 50m; 2 x 100m IM by 25m followed by 2 x 100m kicking. Main set at pace set (e.g. a broken 200m race pace with about 10 seconds rest. Then for a long cool down.
- 17:45: We head back to the hotel. Traffic is hectic so the ride takes longer. We amuse ourselves on the bus by making up and playing guessing games.
- 18h30: We arrive at the hotel in high spirits and as always, very hungry. We head up to the eating hall and dish up food. I try to cut down on the carbs for supper and have more proteins and vegetables. I usually have a glass of milk with it as it helps with recovery.
- 19h10: We have a meeting with all of the coaches and staff and they set out our ground rules for the week. Then it is off to the room.
- 19h40: I have another quick Skype session with my parents and then it is off to bed.
- 20h20: Lights off.

RACE DAY:

- 08h30: My alarm goes off. We don't have a morning session because they wanted us to train at 07:00 this morning. I wake up, take a long shower and get dressed for breakfast.
- 09h00: I have a big breakfast that consists of 3 eggs, 1 slice of toast, 3 strips of bacon, muesli and fruit with yoghurt. I'll have a big breakfast and less lunch.
- 09h45: I head up to get a massage for about 30 minutes. While there I do some trigger points to get the body to wake up and to be ready for tonight.
- 10h30: We have individual meetings with the coaches and staff as they explain to us what they expect of us at this competition. This is not like a normal gala. We only have evening time finals. You only get one shot to make it count.
- 12h00: I go for lunch. I have some meat, but eat more carbs than usual, as it gives more energy to the body. I also have some fruit and yoghurt and enjoy it.
- 12h45: I head to the playroom or entertainment venue. The tension is high, and everybody plays table



tennis or some or other game to take their minds off tonight. I play for a while and then head up to the room.

- 13h20: I quickly Skype my parents and tell them how I feel for tonight. We catch up on all the things that happened in the past week at home and make a few jokes in between.
- 14h00: I get ready to shave – it helps with resistance in the water. I check my racing suite and pack my bag.
- 14h20: I get into bed for a power nap and go through my race and my tactics in my mind.
- 15h30: I wake up and drink an energy drink before making a few more to take with. Time to go over my racing gear checklist. I put my headphones on to listen to some music and walk to the bus.
- 15h45: Tension is high on the bus and no one says a word. All of them are focussing on what they have to do.
- 16h20: We arrive at the pool. I have a good long stretching session an hour and fifteen minutes before I get into the water.
- 18h34: I walk to the call room where my coach gives me the last "swim fast" speech and then its race time and we line up behind the blocks.
- 19h00: I have just finished my race and swam a PB. It is always nice to race against the world's best and to see how they race. I gained so much from the experience. So, Day 1 is finally over and all the nerves are gone. Tomorrow will be even better.

Tatjana Schoenmaker

RACE DAY:

06h45: My alarm goes off, I pick up my phone and press snooze - but not before looking at the time. It's 12 hours and 5 minutes before my race.

06h50: My alarm goes off for the second time. That 5 min snooze did not help and my eyes are barely open when I slip into my training costume.

07h00: I have my usual breakfast: eggs, toast, bacon and cereal. It feels like home.

07h30: We are on the bus heading to the pool. The senior swimmers at the back are setting the tone - they're loud and funny, as if we were on our way to an inter-high school meeting.

08h30: We arrive at the pool, and a new activity is added to my regime - team stretching. I glance at my watch - just over 10 hours before my race. It's all I think about while I do the pre-gala warm-up of about an hour.

10h30: Pre-training is over and I have some time to relax. The trip back to the hotel seems endless - it takes us about 45 minutes. It's a good opportunity for a newbie like me to get to know the other swimmers better.

12h30: Lunch = CARBO-LOAD!! Bread, pasta, rice - I love the snackwich machine and build myself a monster sarmie.

13:00: Nap time! I'm exhausted and really hope I will feel better tonight (6 hours before my race).

15h00: I wake up, slip into my costume again and put on my South African tracksuit. I look in the mirror and feel really proud to see myself wearing the green tracksuit. The excitement of the gala kicks in.

15h15: I grab a peanut butter toast on the way down - it goes down really well ☺! Yummy and good for me!

15h30: We head for the pool for the second time today, but this time it is so quiet on the bus. Every one has their earphones on - no-one is talking. You can almost hear a pin drop. I look around - everyone looks serious and focussed and here I am, bursting with excitement and energy. I can't stop smiling. It's my first big international gala and I love being here.

16h00: It's 3 hours before the race, and we do team stretching again. It's important to keep our muscles warm and supple.



17h30: The gala starts and I know I'm on early - about the 4th event. My nerves are kicking in and this makes it harder to put on my suit. I pull it on halfway and let it hang down until just before the race. The suit is tight and I want to keep my shoulders loose and free for as long as possible.

18h15: Time to get ready. I'm nervous and start pulling my suit over my shoulders. To my horror it tears! There is no time to change because my race is in 20 minutes. Tears are streaming down my face and I am shaking. A few of my team mates walk up to me and re-assure me that it will be okay. It helps a bit to calm me down.

18h30: I'm trying to breathe normally while waiting to be called onto the pool deck. I hear my name, Tatjana Schoenmaker, Lane 4. It is my time to shine! I get to my lane, and fumble when I have to take off my tracksuit. The zip gets stuck. Prr...pr...pr... the first whistle goes and I am still taking off my tracksuit. My hands are shaking, my eyes are tearing and I am not focussed on my race at all. Everything seems to be going wrong.

Prr...pr... the second whistle goes and everyone is on the blocks, except me. As I rush to the blocks, I put on my goggles, which I press too hard and they end up squashing my one eye so tightly that I can hardly see. I climb on the block and I am "ready" to go"Take your marks"... "GO"....

19h00: I'm done, it's over Despite everything, I swam a PB! Coach Graham Hill's smile says it all when I go to him after my race. "I told you could do it! You did well." Now it's time to celebrate and to cheer for my team mates!

Although both Marlies and Tatjana are both in Grade 11, Marlies has competed on international level often. This was Tatjana's first trip to Australia and her first major international gala.