

Arizona Desert Duel 2014

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On March 29th and 30th, the NYAC men's and women's water polo teams officially started the 2014 summer campaign with its first tournament held in Phoenix, Arizona. The tournament included round-robin brackets on Saturday followed by elimination games to crown the winner by Sunday.

The women's squad, entering the weekend as reigning three-time National Champions, had a reputation to uphold. Under the careful tutelage of NYAC coaches Chris Vidale and Pat St. Cin, the NYAC women's team was quick to start the weekend off right in the first game against the Sun Devils. Goalie Betsey Armstrong (Michigan) and Attacker Heather Petri (Cal Berkley), both 2012 Olympic gold medalists, made vital saves and perimeter steals to close out the 4th quarter with a 12-4 win. The second game, against Oakland, saw some great 2-meter defending from current National Team player, KK Clark (UCLA), and 2011 World silver medalist Leah Robertson (Michigan). The winged foot women finished out the game with a comfortable seven goal win against Oakland.

The third and final game of the day would prove to be the hardest of the tournament for the NYAC women. Playing against NCAA collegiate powerhouse Arizona State University, the NYAC team needed to play strategically to come out on top. Stanford standout, Kelly Eaton, used her quick sprinting to outpace ASU defenders to lead the team in goals in the first quarter. Behind by one goal at the half, NYAC team relied on World Championship team member Erika Figge (USC) to unleash a handful out outside shots to tie the game 9-9 by the 4th quarter. Determined by goal differential, the

NYAC's tournament record pushed the team into the championships on Sunday against perennial rival Olympic Club. Determined to bring the City Cup home to New York, UCSB graduate Aimee Stachowski got to work in set-position leading the team in earned ejections and setting up the winged foot women to be the 2014 Arizona Desert Duel Champions with a convincing 14-9 win.

The men's squad started the weekend off in very similar fashion. Trading his water polo suit for a coaches whistle, longtime NYAC member and 2008 Olympic silver medalist, Layne Beaubien (Stanford), made his coaching debut in Arizona. Relying on years of national team experience, Beaubien, with the help of water polo Chairmen Chris Judge, easily guided the men past the Arizona State University Club team in the first game of the tournament with an 11-4 win. In the second game against Club Darkside, Richie Hyden, a two-time Bucknell All-American, exploited his wily left hand shots from post position to give the winged foot men a slight two goal lead in the first half. National team member, Jeff Tyrell (Cal Berkeley), maintained the advantage by sinking multiple back-handed shots from set position to cap off the men's second win of the day with a five goal differential over Darkside.

Day two of the tournament had the NYAC men face off against the LA Sharks on Sunday morning. Ross Sinclair, UCSB All-American, seemed to create plays out of mid-air leaving Shark defense scrambling to contain him. Sergey Kananovich, former Belarussian National Team member, also came up with critical blocks to keep the NYAC men ahead with a 9-2 win. With a 3-0 record heading into the championship game, the pressure was on for the NYAC men to deliver a win against rival Olympic Club. Early on in the first quarter, whole set Adam Cunliff (New Zealand) worked diligently for fouls and quick releases to post players for inside shots. 2013 World University Games member, Christopher Wendt (UCLA), also had critical steals with crisp outlet passes to Ikaika Aki (LMU) to equalize the first half to seven goals each. Sadly, the after a questionable ejection in the 4th quarter, leaving the NYAC defense man-down for 20 seconds, Olympic Club took advantage of the opportunity to sink one more goal in before the final buzzer closing the game with a 14-13 win over the NYAC men's team.

The NYAC men and the women have another opportunity to square off against the Olympic Club in Pomona, California from July 18th-20th for the National Championships as both NYAC teams prepare to defend their 2013 National Titles.