

Erena Calder Hawkins

My passion for badminton started when I was 8 years old and I was introduced to the Hamilton Junior Badminton club by a friend. From this moment on, my passion and dedication to badminton has only increased. There have been key lessons and tournaments I have played in but competing and traveling to my first World Junior Championships in Peru this year was a huge stepping stone to my future as a badminton player.



The first day in my journey started with training in the morning in Auckland before flying out at 6pm. The 12 hour flight to Santiago was then followed by a further 3 hours to Lima, Peru. The first thing I noticed about Peru was the chaos of the traffic and people. The cars didn't seem to follow any order with a lot of cars beeping and crowds of people on the sides of the road. Peru is a lot different to New Zealand and I was excited to be immersed in the Peruvian culture. The first three days consisted of training at the stadium, getting acclimatised to the environment and looking around in Miraflores (the area where our motel was located). The motel was 11km drive to the stadium however this took 45 minutes due the traffic so our 8.30 am training session required us to leave at 7.30 am in the morning. The motel was situated near a busy centre with shops, restaurants and markets. Breakfast was served at the motel but for lunch and dinner the team would go out to the local restaurants. There were a few nice restaurants near our motel however 'Chilli's' was a definite favourite of the teams. 'Chilli's' had food like tacos and quesadillas but after 2 weeks of restaurant food I was definitely ready for some 'home cooked' New Zealand food.



The team event began on the 4th of November with pool matches until 6th of November. In New Zealand's pool there was Australia, Denmark, Korea and Venezuela. Playing Denmark and Korea, both countries ranked in the top 10 in the world, was an amazing experience. Playing mixed doubles in both ties, I found how technically strong both pairs were and also their speed around the court. The big lesson I learnt while playing some of the top countries in the world was the importance of speed and aggression on court. I knew that this was something I needed to work on however the world junior championships provided the opportunity to see these top junior players and how fast and dedicated they were to the sport. I feel that lessons are much easier understood when you learn them through experience rather than just a coach or someone telling you. The New Zealand team lost 5-0 to both Korea and Denmark but some key lessons were learnt about the player's strengths and weaknesses which will benefit us in our training back home. A key match in our pool was the first tie for the team against Australia. We had played the same Australian team earlier in the year at Oceania's in North Harbour. The New Zealand team played some close matches however just losing 3-2. This meant that we placed 4th in our pool and playing Slovenia on the 6th of November.



Coming 29th overall by closely losing to Slovenia and beating Chile and the Dominican Republic in the playoffs was not what I or the team was expecting however as the coaches said that this is the first time New Zealand has had a team at World Junior Champs for about 7 years. There is a large step for New Zealand to be able to compete with the top countries like China and Japan in Badminton however I know that being at World Junior Championships is a huge step not only for myself but for Badminton New Zealand to be seen on the international stage.



In between the team and individual event was a well-deserved rest day, the training hall was booked so we decided to spend the day being tourists. Badminton World Federation had organised a cultural day with organised culture activities held at the Lima art museum. The morning involved a documentary about the festival in Cusco, a tour around the museum, cooking traditional Peruvian food and watching a traditional Peruvian performance. After the cultural activities we did some shopping in Larcomar which is a mall on the side of the Lima cliffs before heading to the opening ceremony.



50 countries were represented in the individual tournament and I think it is outstanding to come from small New Zealand where badminton is a minority sport to see that it is so popular all over the world. The weather in Lima was cloudy and very consistent with mild but humid temperatures. On the first day of individuals the sun came out and was the first time we had seen the sun during our time in Peru. I made it to the second round for both mixed double and women's doubles, losing to an Indonesian pair in women's doubles and a Canadian pair in mixed doubles. Both pairs were very consistent and the Indonesian pair of course being very strong coming from one of the power house countries in badminton. The Canadian mixed pair were good however we were disappointed in the loss as we felt that there could have been improvement in our game.



Flying out of Peru on 13th of November was sad to leave such an amazing country and tournament but excited and ready to come home. We had a 3 hour flight to Santiago, Chile then a 7 hour stopover in Chile before a 12 hour flight to Auckland, New Zealand. I have loved my time in Peru and learning about the culture and being immersed in the new environment. I have always had a passion for learning about cultures and I dream of traveling the world

with this trip being the start of my traveling future. I have loved being able to be a part of this tournament and the atmosphere of the World Junior Champs.



This was definitely a stepping stone to my future as an athlete. I have enjoyed being able to play and watch these top countries play to see where I have to go to be a top world player. I have also enjoyed seeing my strengths as a player showing that New Zealand has the potential to have world class players. I have learnt so much to bring back with me that will only enhance my ability as a player and my passion for the sport. I look forward to applying what I have learnt to my training to be ready for the next tournaments and to have the opportunity to go the World Junior Champs next year (in Spain).

