

Silver for Scottish women in inaugural carp tri-nations

The last 30 seconds waiting for the hooter to end seemed like an eternity for Scotland's six-strong ladies carp team. They had landed one fish between them during a 48-hour marathon and were clinging on to second place in the inaugural tri-nations.

One fish from could have dramatically swung the scales, even at the 11th-hour. There was an eerie silence around Sunny 2 Lake. Then, a shrill sound pierced the cold Lancashire air and sparked a massive celebration.

Eleanor Mitchell and Catherine Robertson embraced. The pair had landed Scotland's only fish. The other four members of the Tartan Team were spread around the water in Lancashire in pairs.

They cheered but could not join in a communal hug, having to stay at their pegs, but Scotland were confirmed as runners-up in the historic women's match.

The raw emotion of Eleanor (right) and Catherine (pictured) spoke volumes. Sleep deprivation, mental and physical fatigue were forgotten in that magic moment. The pair had worked together to winkle out a 20lb 14oz common carp, the only fish caught by Scotland during the contest.

They and the rest of the team had endured over two nights in tents as the thermometer plunged to around zero overnight and climbed to the lofty height of 6C during the day. The wind shifted but there was a sharp chill factor and it hit Eleanor and Catherine's peg head-on for much of the contest.

The adrenaline kicked in for the pair. The emotion overflowed. They wrapped the Saltire flag around themselves. Tears were shed, but Scotland were silver medallists and the sextet are the first women to represent Scotland in an international coarse fishing event in the history of the sport.

A small step possibly in the annals of sport, but a massive step for women's fishing North of the Border and a significant achievement, but the tight-knit squad desperately want to kick on from here. They are not satisfied. They are already dissecting their tactics at Wyreside and looking to improve.,

For the record, Scotland finished behind Wales at the superbly-appointed Wyreside Lakes complex near Lancaster, but ahead of pre-event favourites, England, who failed to catch despite, like Scotland, having trained at the venue which has six lakes for coarse and pike fishing, plus a campsite and pod tends, .

And Scotland's success here put the cap on four years of prompting, cajoling, trials and tribulations, set-backs, plus hours on the phone speaking to possible candidates, to form a team.

The squad now goes forward to the World Championships in France at the end of September at a location four hours drive from Paris. There competition is over 72 hours, a marathon spell in which the women are not allowed out of a small zone for any reason. They admit to being nervous, but are 100 per cent up for the challenge. Their fishing Everest awaits across the Channel.

Brighton-based Joanne Barlow, the team captain, who is Australian by birth but qualifies because of a Scottish mother, said: "It was an amazing weekend (at Wyreside). The first-ever ladies tri-nations, the first time a Scottish ladies team has represented the country in a coarse fishing competition, and we won a silver medal.

"Conditions were really tough, very cold, which made for very hard fishing and massive congratulations to Wales for taking gold. They landed four fish overall for nearly 60lb using the same tactics as we did.

"Eleanor and Catherine worked as a team and landed the fish. It was on Catherine's rod and the fish arrived at around 4pm on the Friday, the first full day of the competition, and they were using a pop up rig with a pink, salty squid bait, on a spinner rig. It worked."

She added that Scotland were an inexperienced team, but thanked the England and Welsh ladies teams for their support, encouragement and friendship and Joanne added: "Together we grow stronger."

The skipper added: "I've fished in a number of competitions before but I felt the pressure as this was a team effort. This was a step-up even for me and some of the girls are inexperienced at competition fishing.

"Yes, this was a massive step-up for them, and the worlds will be another level again. They are scared but 100 per cent want to do this. It will be physically and mentally demanding, certainly, but we are so proud to have represented Scotland at their first international and we want to keep this going."

It was Catherine from Glasgow, the team's vice-captain, who is originally from Taynuilt, goes into the record books for landing the first fish for a Scotland women's team in an international coarse fishing match and she said: "To get us on the scoreboard had me absolutely buzzing and extremely proud,

but I could not have done it without Eleanor.”

Eleanor, who is originally from Dunblane but now resident in the Thames Valley, was her bankside partner. Ruth Cormack, recently restored to match fishing, and a resident of Govan, was paired with the team captain, and Niki Wildman from Wishaw and Margo Robinson from Dumbarton made up another pair.

All pairs all worked together, taking it in turns to man the rods during the night and discussing tactics. No matter how hard the women tried, using rigs to fish near the bottom, switching to different colours of wafter or boilies, casting long and short, or using zigs to possibly tempt the fish higher in the water column, the carp would not come out to play, apart from that one fish.

Eleanor, a former NHS chief pharmacist and director of an English primary care trust, who studied at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, summed up the emotion felt by the group when she said: “First cap for Scotland and silver medal winners, dreams do come true.”