

GB v Portugal

Match 2 – 11th June 2011

GB 3-1 Portugal (25-27, 25-11, 25-20, 25-15)

The home team started off with great confidence from the win the day before. Rachel Laybourne, returning to the starting six after being out for several months following a shoulder operation got the first point of the match which set the tempo for the rest of the game. This was followed by a cross court hit from Rachel Bragg into the Portugal open space. Bragg continued to dominate front court leaving the Portuguese side in disarray resulting in their first time-out of the match at 5-1 down.

Portugal were able to pull a three point deficit back after the first technical time-out to take the lead for the first time in the set at 9-8 through Portugal Captain Bonemia Gomes spiking front court. The score continued to remain close until captain Lynne Beattie went back to serve, playing a key role in the taking the score to 14-11.

The three point lead remained until the second technical time-out. Portugal's Nuria Silva tallied up the points for the visitors, despite her diminutive size, Silva's high jump managed to fly over the GB block. In contrast GB's new 6' 4" recruit, Ciara Michel used her towering height through the middle hitting well inside the 3m line.

Portugal clawed it back to 19 all, taking the lead through an Aline Rodrigues' spike resulting in a GB time-out at 20-19 down. Grace Carter pulled it back with a tip to level the score. Brilliant back court cover by Bragg kept the rally alive at 20-20 before Portugal eventually won the point.

Things started to heat up towards the business end of the set. A handling error by Portugal gave GB the lead at 22-21. Two consecutive blocks by Carter gave GB set point. However, the visitors were not prepared to give up without a fight and managed to save the three set points, one coming after a collision by two GB players to try and save the ball that had sailed towards the statisticians table after a wipe off the block. Portugal gained their first set point through Rodrigues block kill, only for Carter to respond with a quick attack through the middle to level the scores once again. Portugal's Gomes sealed the next two points for the visitors giving them their first set win of the weekend, 27-25.

Carter racked up the points for GB in the opening of the second set; a quick attack through the middle, followed by a successful block gave GB another early lead. Bragg continued to hammer the ball through four which Portugal was unable to respond to taking GB to a 6-2 advantage. Carter continued to upset the Portuguese serve receive with her clever serving that they struggled to pass, combined with bullet hitting attacks by Bragg escalating into a five point lead at 8-3.

A Jo Morgan tip at 10-5 forced Portugal into their second time-out of the set. GB started to walk away with the set midway through gaining a ten point cushion over the visitors by the second technical time-out. Morgan's serving was instrumental in tallying up the points with a run of eight serves taking GB to 19-7. Portugal only managed to reach double figures through a number of attacking errors by GB. Coach Cooper made a double substitution bringing on Newton and Viggars to help close the set at 23-10. The substitution played dividends with a Newton block taking GB to set point, followed by an Osborne block through the middle to secure the point to take the set 25-11.

The Morgan and Carter partnership through the middle continued to win points in the third set taking them four points clear at 8-4. Portugal's captain Gomes kept the visitors in the game at 10-6 with line shots catching GB off guard.

Substitutes Newton and Viggars returned to the court at 17-11. The Osborne block cancelled out the Gomes's attack taking GB to an eight point lead at 20-12. A GB collision that brought two players down gave Portugal the much needed gap on court to kill the ball, giving them a vital point at 20-14.

Portugal began to close the gap towards the end of the set to two points through Gomes serving and Nuria Silva hitting through four. GB was handed set point through a Portugal handling error at 24-20. The set was finished off by a Carter attack through the middle to take the set 25-20.

Portugal started off the fourth set the stronger team, much to the credit of the Portuguese libero Daniela Louriero who was the star player for Portugal throughout the match. Louriero made some phenomenal pick-ups which helped in getting Portugal to a two point advantage at 4-2.

This lead did not last long, with accurate passing from GB, setter Morgan was able to utilise all hitting options, the most effective coming through the middle that helped take GB two points ahead. Blocking proved the strong part of the play for the home team with two consecutive blocks from Carter and Bragg, Carter's which took GB three points clear at the first technical time-out.

Unable to close the gap Portugal Head Coach Igmar Montalvo called a time-out at 11-7 down. Demon serving by Morgan caused Portugal to take their second time-out moments later at 14-8.

GB called a time out at 15- 11 after the passing unit started to lose accuracy. GB came back on court to take the next point through Beattie roll shot which caught Portugal on their heels. Portugal began to look defeated and started to let errors slip into their game giving GB some easy points. Bragg served for match point at 24-14, the final point coming courtesy of a back court hit from Beattie to close the game 25-15.

GB Head Coach Audrey Cooper commented after the match: "It's great to get another win under our belt. We made hard work of the first set and let a healthy lead slip away from us. I am pleased how the team responded in the second set and we were able to show that we were the stronger side. There were some really great moments in the game and all players that were brought in did the job I asked of them."

Key Stats:

Serve Receive:	Team: 2.39 (Bertelli 2.46 from 24 balls, Beattie 2.44 from 25)
Kills/Efficiency:	Team: 48 / 22.83% (Carter 12 / 42.9%, Beattie 11 / 21.2%, Bragg 11 / 23%)
Blocks:	Team: 14 (Carter 7)
MVP:	Grace Carter

Squad:

**3. Nic Osborne, 4. Rachel Laybourne, 5. Rachel Newton, 6. Jenn Taylor, 7. Maria Bertelli (Libero)
8. Rachel Bragg, 9. Jo Morgan, 10. Lynne Beattie (Captain), 15. Stacey O'Connor, 16. Meg Viggars
18. Grace Carter, 19. Ciara Michel**