

EuroHockey Club of the Year 2009 winners, MHC Fletiomare, NED  
Mrs. Marijke Fleuren, Vice-president EHF presents them with their award at the Rabo Trophy



Siobhán Madeley, EHF caught up with the 2010 winners of the EuroHockey Club of the Year Award, MHC Fletiomare and met with its President Coraline Bronsky (Coraline is pictured 3<sup>rd</sup> from left above):

**SM: Where did you hear about the EuroHockey Club of the Year Award?**

CB: We heard about the Award via the regular e-newsletter from the KNHB in November 2009.

**SM: How did you decide to enter?**

After reading the criteria for the award and reviewing the achievements of MHC Fletiomare in the recent past, we felt that we had made great progress in all award criteria and therefore decided to nominate ourselves. It was a great opportunity for us and all volunteers to stop and think about all we had achieved and to celebrate the successes!

We had just applied also for a local council award in Utrecht. But the EuroHockey Club of the Year award was more focused. In fact we were nominated for the Utrecht Award in December 2009, along with an athletics club and netball and we proceeded to win the overall Utrecht award at an awards night in January 2010!

**SM: Why did you think that your club should be EuroHockey Club of the Year?**

CB: MHC Fletiomare has had a turbulent past ten years, with only 80 members in 1999 and near bankruptcy, the club then decided to fight for the future of the hockey in our area and with success! Three subsequent boards, together with many volunteers working in various commissions, have put enormous passion and effort in the hockey club to secure member growth and the necessary capacity. This has resulted in a prosperous club with solid finances, a brand new clubhouse and 5.5 pitches at the start of the season 2010/2011.

The club developed a mission and a vision to guide the growth and future direction of the club and to focus the efforts of all volunteers that make this possible. We have included in this vision strategic objectives for the social responsible role of the club; from a member-survey it was clear that the vast majority of the club felt that the club should play a social responsible role in the neighbouring community. Since then we have successfully established a G-Hockey offering (hockey for children with intellectual disabilities), we are now housing an after school club in our clubhouse and we employ a person who spends 60% of their time working with schools and welfare organisations in the

area to realise an open sports offering for children (stimulating the participation of children in sports). For the youth a social internship coordinator has been appointed and Fletiomare is now an acknowledged "learning company" and we have more plans for the future!

**SM: The EHF felt that your work on converting soccer pitches to hockey pitches was one of the reasons that you won this award, can you tell me a little about this experience?**

CB: After our move in 2005 to a new accommodation, coming from 1 pitch to 3.5 pitches and from a very old dilapidated club house to our beautiful new "pavilion" with the club being situated in the middle of an area where the city of Utrecht was, and still is, building some 30,000 houses for approximately 80,000 citizens, it quickly became clear that the number of pitches was wholly insufficient for the current and future demands in the area. The waiting list was growing rapidly and we had to turn down many children every year – children who had no alternatives and no prospects to play hockey, as all the other clubs in the surrounding villages were full as well!

As a club, and as evidenced by the responses of members in the members-survey on this subject, we found it unacceptable that in this age, in which too many children are obese and exercise too little, children could not play the sport of their choice.

Whilst we acknowledged that it was going to be extremely difficult to get new pitches constructed near our location (every single square centimetre of ground has been sold to the project developers to build houses), we decided it was worth a try and therefore spent 2 years lobbying in the neighbourhood, the council, political parties and the neighbouring football clubs and anybody else who was willing to listen, fighting for this cause. In this we were supported by the KNHB.

We tabled many creative solutions and we were challenged by the council to find a solution together with the football clubs. It was a long process, and at the start frowned upon by the football clubs, but in the end and with the support of the chairmen of the boards of the two football clubs we were able to find a win-win situation for all parties involved, that entailed speeding up the conversion of natural grass pitches to astro turf for both football clubs which provided them with additional playing capacity. Hence one of the football pitches is now being converted into two hockey pitches.

With the extended playing capacity we can, in the long run, expand our youth branch from 750 to 1100 members. Each year, in the youngest youth section, we can welcome an additional 32 children (50% more than in the past) and since January 2010 we have already admitted 250 children that we had on our waiting list, some of them for more than 3 years, much to their parents' great joy!

**SM: What was the reaction of the Club when you heard you won?**

CB: We were very proud to receive this award and feel it is an important recognition of all the work that is done on a voluntary basis by so many people in this club. In addition it is a stimulus to continue on our road to achieve our vision.

**SM: You were presented with your award at the Rabo Trophy – was this a proud moment for the club and did you enjoy this experience?**

CB: It was of course a very proud moment and we also enjoyed watching the Dutch national team making a very strong impression against Argentina.

**SM: We noticed that there has been interest from the press in your local area about the award, can you tell us a little bit more about that?**

CB: After we won an award as the best sports club in Utrecht in 2009 we had some press interest! Of course getting a European title is even more prestigious and therefore attracted the interest of the press. One of the journalists from a well known Utrecht daily newspaper came with us to the presentation of the award and wrote a full page article and used the photograph below. It is wonderful to see that the little girl on the right of the photo was on our waiting list for 4 years, so the new pitches have meant we can now have her in our club!

The press interest is important for the external recognition of the work of our volunteers it also gives us an opportunity to attract media attention for current and future sponsors.

**SM: Tell me more about your work with parents?**

CB: Parents are incredibly important to us. They are a great source of volunteers for our organisation. Many of our parents play hockey themselves, either in veteran teams or as "trim hockey players"; we encourage this as this strengthens the commitment to the club and it enlarges the pool of volunteers we can pull from. At each season-end, we organise a BBQ to thank our volunteers for all their enthusiasm and time and their partners for "putting up" with their absences.

**SM: A big part of your club philosophy is sportsmanship and respect, we hear a lot about this concept in sport, can you tell me some of the practical things that you do in the club to make sure this is a living philosophy?**

CB: Sportsmanship and respect are specifically highlighted as one of our key values in the mission of our club. We train umpires each year, both new and existing, to become better at leading matches and we have an umpire of the year award, we issue guidelines to team managers on how we view this subject (which includes habits such as shaking your opponents hands after a match and the concluding of the match with drinks in the clubhouse) and we organise a weekend of "sportsmanship and respect" every year. We now have a team of three people that plan and organise this weekend, in order to highlight this value in an original and fun way.

Of course we also have a "tuchtcommissie" (disciplinary committee) that deals with excesses and fortunately in the past 3 years this committee has only convened and advised the board on one occasion. Finally, we have a "vertrouwenspersoon" (counsellor) that is available should members have experienced something that they want to talk about with someone in confidence in this way we ensure a safe environment for our players.

What are the future plans for the club?

Our first priority this coming year is to ensure the organisation deals well with the significant growth (from 1250 in 2009/2010 to 1600 in 2010/11). So far the intake from the waiting list of children has gone extremely well, but it will take some time to incorporate them and embed everything.

We are also working hard to satisfy current sponsors and attract new sponsors in order to get additional funding to improve the quality of training and coaching; our vision is for each team to have a good and qualified coach and trainer, but this is costly. For sure having this EuroHockey Club of the Year award will make it a little easier to attract sponsors and subsidies into the club. This award shows to the outside world that the club is serious and not an amateur organisation.

Another priority is to get smarter and more efficient in filling vacancies in our organisation (ca 110 volunteers in the board and commissions and another 300 accompanying teams as manager and coach) and to keep inspiring and motivating all these fantastic volunteers, who, after all, don't get paid for what they do, but have to satisfy themselves in the knowledge that they are contributing to the success of their club.

Finally, we want to continue our social responsibility journey and in this area we already have ideas for Knotshockey (hockey with a soft bat for 60+) and hockey for immigrants.

**SM: Do you think that the EHF should promote this award more and how do you think we can do that?**

CB: yes I think you need to get it to as many clubs as possible. It is a huge extra promotion for any club and a wonderful external recognition of their volunteers.

**SM: And finally... we hope that your players will enjoy warming up and training proudly with the EuroHockey Club of the Year training bibs! As for the certificate, will you find somewhere in the club for that??**

CB: of course we will find a prominent place for this, maybe even over our cosy fireplace!

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