

## Unique Challenges for USA Women Select Sides

Written by Jackie Finlan  
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The 2013 Las Vegas Invitational has been a unique experience for the USA Women. It's not the first time the 7s Eagles have entered two select sides – USA Stars and USA Stripes – into the tournament; however, it is the first time the mixed professional sides have had to play both club and national teams during the day.



“It's hard to play teams that play disjointed because it tends to make us play disjointed,” USA Stripes captain Katie Dowty said of the non-national teams they faced during pool play. “When you start out hard in a tournament like Houston, you have to be playing together from the get-go. You build from there, and play more and more together. Whereas, today, we didn't really start to gel until our last game against Japan, which is a national side. It's exactly what we needed before tomorrow, because we'll probably end up playing another national side [in the knockouts].”

The USA Stripes started with a 29-0 victory over Canada's Dog River Howlers (tries: Nathalie Marchino 3 [Photo right, Dobson Images], Vix Folayan, Amanda Street; conversions: Kimber Rozier 2), then followed with a 26-0 shutout over the Combined Services Select (tries: Jill Potter, Vanesha McGee 2, Natalie Kosko; conversions: Rozier 3). They finished the day with a 33-14 win over Japan (tries: Folayan 2, McGee, Marchino, Street; conversions: Rozier 4).

On the other side, the USA Stars only played twice, as pool play opponent Laie Parkside forfeited all of their matches. The Stars started with a solid 36-0 victory over Argentina (tries: Christy Ringgenberg 3, Lauren Doyle, Sadie Anderson, Deven Owsiany; conversions: Anderson 2, Meya Bizer 2), and after a five-hour break, fell 17-0 to an eager, peppy Maple Leafs 2.

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The Americans had their highlights – from individual efforts like brilliant, side-stepping gallops from Marchino, Folayan and Ringgenberg, to name a few; and aggressive, hard-hitting defense from Ryan Carlyle and Dowty. But there were the shortcomings as well – botched kickoff receipts, turnovers in the breakdown (mostly against Maple Leafs 2), and falling off tackles.

Some of that inconsistent play was simply skill, and some of it was mentality, as Dowty referenced earlier. The cold, biting wind also played a factor, pushing and halting some passes and kicks. Additionally the professional players were divided evenly between the two select sides, and although there were veteran and newer players filling out the rosters, the disruption could be felt.

“This is different for us for sure,” Dowty said. “It’s a different kind of challenge. ... [USA Women’s 7s coach] Ric [Suggitt] just keeps throwing challenges at us and we keep taking them.

“We’re always trying to develop our pool so that everyone can go out there and play in a game,” Dowty added. “The more veteran the rest of us are becoming, the more we’re getting our systems in place, and it makes it easier to pass it along girls at places like this, in a tournament like Vegas.”

Game plan and strategies are easier to convey, but it’s the Chula Vista residents who are practicing them daily. And as Dowty and team experienced, it takes a little time to find their groove on the pitch, even if they’re posting double-digit wins over the competition.

“I felt really good by the end of the Japan game,” Dowty said. “We built consistently over the course of the day. We went from playing individually to definitely playing together by the end of that Japan game.”

The USA Stripes were trailing 14-7 into the half against Japan, which can step, tackle and take off. The Americans rallied after the half, holding Japan scoreless while running in another four tries.

“Sometimes that’s exactly what you need –a slap in the face to get your blood flowing, your

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competitive spirit flowing,” Dowty said. “We needed that to get on the same page and stop joking around.”

In addition to having play various levels of competition, the American teams also faced many former teammates on the Emperor’s Atlantis and Beavers International Elite.

“On Atlantis, all but two of them are old Eagles,” Dowty said. “Probably someone on every team knows someone on our select sides. That’s a bit of fun ... sometimes. We’re trying to stay really focused and represent the USA, but at the same time, it’s your friends. You want to joke around with them on the field. That’s OK.”

OK for now. Tomorrow starts the knockouts, and both sides experienced the gut-checks they needed to be ready for playoffs – especially since both Maple Leaf sides didn’t allow a point-against all day.