

Malifa Voices Backline Frustration

Written by
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There's a lot on Nese Malifa's shoulders these days. The flyhalf is just about the only choice right now for the USA rugby team's #10 jersey, and will have a lot of work to do to bring the backline together and ensure the Eagles get some more points on the scoreboard.

Coming off the Eagles' 44-13 loss to Tonga, Malifa said the backs are feeling responsible.

"It was a tough loss," Malifa told RUGBYMag.com. "We all sat down and looked at the positives, but we also looked at the negatives. Every mistake we made is fixable. We talked about depth coming onto attack and counterattack. That's been a big part of dealing with the forward passes. We were way too flat on attack. We put ourselves in position to force passes, and they were forward."

Sounding intense and perhaps a little frustrated, Malifa said the difference between the backline doing its job and making some serious mistakes is tiny.

"Everyone has a job to do, everyone knows his assignments," said the flyhalf. "Everyone should do his job. We sat down and looked at the game. We talked about lot of combinations, and also looked at the positives. Every mistake we made is fixable. We know we had a lack of communication coming from the inside on defense and that hurt us. We know we need to take space away more on defense, and our one-on-one tackles were pretty poor. There were some

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good things we did as a team, too.”

The backline spent a lot of time in sessions following the Tonga game on defense and kicking. Defense coach Mike Tolkin stressed keeping low in the tackle and not leaving your feet (many USA players were reaching up to tie up the ball, and found themselves shoved bodily backward by the big Tongan runners), and bringing in a second tackler when needed.

The sessions, Malifa said, have been productive, but the players know they also need to execute on game day.