

Win Nice but Eagle Coach Wants More

Written by
Saturday, 18 June 2011 14:43



Nothing like winning a rugby game. USA Head Coach Eddie O'Sullivan saw his squad win their first match in five games, as the Eagles defeated Russia 32-25 in the Churchill Cup.

In a game that was in doubt all the way, with the lead hopping between being tied or in possession of one or other team on a constant basis. Russia led 3-0, 11-8, and 18-11. The game was tied 0-0, 3-3, 8-8, 11-11, 18-18, and 25-25. The USA led 8-3, 25-18, and, most importantly, 32-25 at the end.

"It could have gone either way," acknowledged the USA coach. "But we dug deep, especially when we were behind. I am happy with the result, it's important to get the win, but I'm not getting carried away."

With nine days to work on their cohesion the Eagles looked far better with the ball. They made some turnovers in the ruck, but avoided the string of knock-ons and forward passes that plagued them against Tonga. Their scrum hung on desperately, while the lineout, while imperfect, did well to steal Russian throw-ins at crucial moments.

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And what really worked was Nese Malifa's kicking for distance and space, the patience in backline attack, and the counter-rucking.

"I felt we'd be more cohesive and we were better in our error rate," said O'Sullivan. "There was a heavy rain just before the game and it might have been hard to see on television, but the ball was very slippery. Still we were better.

"Nese did very well and it was the first time I've seen him really back in form since the Georgia game. He's not 100 percent but he's getting there. We worked a lot on the counter-rucks. You have to pick your moment. If you do it at the wrong time you can get burned. I though we made some good reads on that."

And the team produced some good tries. Paul Emerick's opening score (he has scored a try in each of the USA's last four test matches) was right off the training pitch. Tai Enosa's try, while not a planned move, was the direct result of work done in practice.

"Tai's try was from things we've been working on in training – dragging defenders out and dropping runners into the space you create," said O'Sullivan.

In the end, though, the win means a boost of confidence, especially since it came against a team the Eagles will play in the World Cup. It also seemed clear both teams were playing their cards close to their vest, Certainly we will see a few more wrinkles when the two teams play in New Zealand."

"I learned a lot about the new caps," said O'Sullivan. "I now have a much better sense of where we are as a squad and got a lot of info. I think we deserved to win, but to beat Russia next time we are going to have to up our game."