

U20s Underperform vs Uruguay

Written by Jackie Finlan

Wednesday, 01 June 2011 07:36

Hopes to exit pool play with a win were dashed during this morning's Junior World Cup game, as the USA U20s lost 33-5 to Uruguay. The match was much more competitive than the score suggests, and it was an absolutely winnable game for the Americans, but the Eagles proved to be their own worst enemy. Break after break was killed by a handling error or penalty, and Uruguay did well to make the USA pay for their mistakes.



What looked like opening-minute nerves actually typified the USA's play throughout the game. From the get-go, the Eagles found themselves in scoring position. Uruguay had cleared the opening kickoff to touch, and the USA used the subsequent lineout to work some quick-ball phases toward the tryline. But with one more punch to go, a knock-on awarded Uruguay the scrum, which saw the ball kicked back to midway.

Early on, it looked like the Eagles' counterattack would be one of its biggest attributes, and the potential was certainly there. Brilliant breakaways and support lines ate up yardage, but once again, an errant pass here or there would kill momentum and hand over possession.

U20s Underperform vs Uruguay

Written by Jackie Finlan

Wednesday, 01 June 2011 07:36

Around the six-minute mark, Uruguay took its first steps into American territory. A botched clearing kick moved Uruguay close to the 22 meter, and after a series of punches, the ball worked wide and fullback Guillermo Del Cerro got his shoulders past the defense for the corner try, 5-0.

The USA kept at it, and outside center Will Farrell did well to keep his team on the front foot, barreling through defenders with every carry. But every time the USA started to find some rhythm, the penalties halted progress, and Uruguay's Felipe Berchesi made the Eagles pay. If the USA was unaware of the outside center's range, they were quickly educated at the 20-minute mark, when Berchesi nailed a penalty near the 50 meter, 8-0. What was even more incredible was the fact that kick was a quick one; the wind kept knocking the ball over and Berchesi only had enough time for a hurried run-up, but it was enough. He would hit two more before the close of the half.

The Eagles got their lone points of the match about five minutes later and showcased the vast potential the squad retains. Uruguay had been attacking in the USA's end but the Eagles turned the ball over and immediately sent the ball wide to take advantage of a slow-reacting defense. The left wing took off down the line, burning one defender and setting up on two-on-one against Del Cerro. A little inside pass to flyhalf Will Magie in support opened up the green for the easy try, 11-5.

But it was as close as the Eagles would get to closing the gap. In addition to two Berchesi penalties, Uruguay Joaquin Prada ran in a try at 34 minutes, when the USA defense failed to pressure the inside center and allowed him a tiny lane to the tryline. Fringe defense had been a focal point for the Americans coming out of their first two games, and to their credit, Uruguay found little success close to the breakdown. They were, however, able to make significant yardage punching farther from the ruck and out wide, as the USA struggled to make it's first-up tackles or do so immediately.

Down 19-5 at the half, the USA needed to hit the ground running in the second stanza if they were going to have any chance at chipping away at the two-score deficit. But the same story continued: opportunity killed by little mistakes.

Uruguay scored at 57th minute when a couple of wide forward punches drew several defenders into the group tackles. It opened up enough space for lock Franco Lammana to finish off some tight offloads to the tryline. Berchesi hit the conversion for the 26-5 lead.

U20s Underperform vs Uruguay

Written by Jackie Finlan

Wednesday, 01 June 2011 07:36

One of the USA's best scoring opportunities followed as the team got back into its quick-ball rhythm, working the sidelines and retaining possession well. An up and under from the 22 meter saw the Uruguay receiver driven into touch at the five meter, but the botched pass from lineout jumper to scrumhalf handed the ball to Uruguay. The Americans were still in good position during the subsequent counterattack, but the finishing pass out wide fell short.

It was the final blow. Uruguay, now confident it could contain the American's counters, continued to kick, and the USA lineouts didn't take advantage as throw-ins sailed long and more opportunity was lost. To add to the frustration, Uruguay's No. 8 pierced the defense to return to USA territory and set up a couple of phases that saw a wide punch hit an inside trailer, who stiff-armed one defender for the try. Berchesi's conversion marked the final points of the day for the 33-5 win.

The Americans were not outmatched. The players had trouble finishing when at top speed and have one more game on Sunday to sync its offense. They'll play the loser of Canada v Zimbabwe in the 7th place match.