

Magleby Reflects on 2-1 Day for USA

Written by Alex Goff

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After falling behind 21-0 against Portugal, the USA team had to make a decision.



If they packed it in after seven minutes on Day One at Port Elizabeth, they would be facing

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disappointment yet again – finishing third or fourth in a winnable pool. If they made changes now, then maybe things would turn their way.

“They could have packed it in after that first half” said USA Head Coach Alex Magleby. “But they didn’t and I’m proud of them.”

Magleby put Luke Hume on the field in that second half, and the Eagles went to work. Folau Niuia scored in the opening minute and Maka Unufe added one more, and while the USA didn’t win that game, they gained something.

That confidence flowed on into a match with Canada that the Eagles ultimately won 26-12. Yes they were helped with Phil Mack’s sending off, but that was just part of it.

“I think the Canadian guys were tired; some of them had been on the 15s tour as well and were kind of banged up,” said Magleby. “But our guys took it to them physically. I was really pleased with that. We made some good decisions with the ball and at times just grinded it out because that’s what we had to do.”

Banged up themselves, the USA faced Zimbabwe keenly aware that the African team is no walkover. The Americans won, despite a few iffy passes and other mistakes, in part because they just kept working, and in part because Folau Niuia was perfect on all his conversions, and ended the day 7-9 on kicking.

“I am really proud of Folau and happy for him” said Magleby. “He’d been injured and it was a long way back for him. But he’s worked hard and today was what comes of a lot of hard work done in the previous weeks and months.”

So the Eagles had a relatively easy pool (although Portugal and Canada have been beating a lot of teams lately), but they still came out of it with two wins.

“I am amazed at the parity we have on the circuit right now,” said Magleby. “We might have been fortuitous in this pool, but these teams are good teams and they’re playing well. Now we look to Day Two and whether it’s the Cup the Plate or the Bowl, we have a job to do.”

The USA faces hosts South Africa in the Cup Quarterfinals, and the crowd is expected to be a big one.

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“How great is that?” enthused Magleby. “We get to play the hosts in front of their home crowd. We’re excited.”

They are also a bit banged up. Like most teams on the World Series circuit nearing the end of the second tournament in as many weekends, the Eagles are struggling with a few injuries. Maka Unufe was taken off the field as a precaution against Zimbabwe. He, and a couple of other players, will be evaluated on Sunday morning.

Sunday certainly looks to be a tough day, but when you’re in the top eight, some of those bruises don’t seem to hurt as much.