The first players to participate in the 7s Olympic Development Program are Trevor Tanifum, Pase Iosia and Iniki Fa'amausili. They're all training on a daily basis at the Columbus branch of Tiger Rugby, working with Paul Holmes and skills coach Elliott Pollard.

Tanifum, a Maryland Terrapin, took the Collegiate Rugby Championship by storm last spring, leading the tournament in tries with 10. That performance earned him a spot on the 7s All American squad. Tanifum is English-born and raised and has been playing rugby since the age of seven. He spent two years in the London Irish Academy.

Tanifum has graduated from Maryland and wants to become an Eagle. He reached out to the Tiger coaches, and they did their homework on him.

“I spoke to some of the coaches, including Al Caravelli and Tony Pacheco, and a lot of guys loved him, said he’s got big upside, but he needs to be polished up,” said Tiger coach James Walker.

“Obviously, just judging from the CRC, you don’t score 10 tries in a tournament unless you at least have something going for you. That said, the CRC is not that high of a level of competition, but he is playing against his peers and dominating. If we can get him dominating his peers at the next level, scoring 10 tries a tournament, he’s going to do pretty well for himself.”

Fa’amausili and Iosia were on the U20s team that won the Junior World Rugby Trophy last summer, they’re both playing DI men’s club rugby (Iosia for Belmont Shore and Fa’amausili for Glendale), and they both have bright futures.

“Those guys are the typical Polynesian boys – they come in, they’re naturally very gifted rugby players, but a lot of them don’t really get the chance to get into the gym,” said Walker. “They’ve both got decent fundamentals. But we fitness tested them, and especially in the upper body, they were very weak. I mean, very weak.”

Holmes, a personal trainer and fitness guru by trade, is going to try and put some meat on Iosia and Fa’amausili before they go back to their respective clubs in 4-6 weeks time.

“Our thoughts are they’ve both operated at a pretty good level for their age, the Junior World Rugby Trophy,” said Walker, “but if we put some muscle on them it will transform their games.”

These three players represent just the first wave of players to participate in the ODP. Walker and Holmes are hoping to bring in some more Olympic hopefuls following USA Sevens and the Las Vegas Invitational.