

Spotlight Brightens on Isles in Vegas

Written by Pat Clifton

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Make no mistake, Vegas is a special tournament for every American player. It's the one time of the year their friends and families see them in the professional environment. They may follow online or television during other tournaments, but in Las Vegas, the 7s Eagles become true celebrities.

This year, though, Vegas is a little more special for one man in particular – Carlin Isles. He's been playing rugby for less than a year, giving up the chance to run at the Olympic Trials for rugby last summer, and the USA Sevens in Sin City's Sam Boyd Stadium will be the first time Isles' mom, dad and 10 siblings get to watch him play rugby live. Short of Isles fiancé, none of his family has seen him play in person.

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“They’re very excited for me. They can’t wait. They can’t believe it. They’re excited to watch me play the game and see how it is. They’re ready to see it live,” Isles said of his parents, seven sisters and three brothers.

Isles has gotten a lot of attention, domestically and internationally, for someone who is getting about three-to-four minutes of action a game. In Wellington, Isles was featured in the local papers leading up to the tournament and had the camera zoomed in on him numerous times while he sat on the bench during the broadcast. But his intriguing story and mesmerizing speed are hard for the media to ignore.

In Las Vegas, he’ll get even more attention, as he’s the cover boy for the USA Sevens program, tee-shirts with his name and likeness are expected to be sold and this is the first time many of the 2.7 million people who’ve seen his YouTube highlight reel will get to see him play in person.

“Of course it puts pressure on me to put on a good show, but I’ve got to just focus on what I got to do and make it happen,” Isles said.

Isles’ upside is why he’s on the Eagles roster for Vegas, but coach Alex Magleby will have to manage how to deal with the downside of his celebrity – expectation. People want to see Isles play.

“For us, there’s going to be a lot of pretty exciting opportunities with our family and friends and local charities and schools and the press and the rugby community in the United States, so that’s an exciting opportunity as long as we manage it correctly and we can really then use that energy to improve performance from New Zealand in Vegas,” said Magleby

“And there would be nothing better than doing that in front of our home crowd, who for the most part won’t even see us until next year...That’s a really exciting opportunity, and you want to perform in front of the crowd, no doubt.”