Since the inauguration of the IRB Women's Sevens World Series, some countries have impressed with an uptick in performance – like Russia – while others have struggled to retain their top status. Canada falls into the latter category, having finished 6th in Dubai and now 7th at the Houston 7s.

After a solid start on day one, Canada burst into the Cup quarterfinals against New Zealand, scoring off the opening kickoff and shocking – everyone.

But the euphoria didn't last, as New Zealand rallied just enough for the 12-10 win.

"We came pretty close against New Zealand," Canada coach John Tait said. "We were disappointed because we felt we gave away a few penalties in our own end, which ultimately cost us the game. … Mentally it was a big drain on us. We lost Ashley Steacy, who's a key playmaker for us, especially with Ghislaine Landry out. That took a little out of us and probably affected us against the Nethelands."

In Plate semifinals, Canada squared up against the Netherlands, which had played England to a 19-14 loss in the Cup quarterfinals. The game didn't go as planned, and Canada fell 19-5.

"The most disappointing loss was against Netherlands," Tait said. "The game started out well for us, and we had an opportunity with a five-meter scrum, but made a mental error, and the game turned around from there."

Canada did bounce back in the 7th place match, however, out-classing South Africa 33-0. They needed that definitive win to end their Houston 7s campaign, but none of the players, as they exited the pitch, looked pleased.

“We have high expectations,” Tait said. “Over the past couple of years we’ve had a lot of success. Dubai was a big disappointment for us. This tournament, our goal was to get in the top four.

“Saying that, the positive thing is that we trialed a few new players in our top team and they stepped up for some of our girls who are out right now,” Tait added. “We’re adding to the depth of our program, our experience, and we’ll learn a lot from that.”

Aside from Jen Kish, who was the undeniable spark and heart of the team, Tait was pleased with Kelly Russell’s performance.

“Alongside Kish, she played the most minutes over the weekend,” Tait said. “She made good decisions throughout the tournament and was solid in all aspects of play. I’m happy for her because she struggled at the end of last year, and she’s pushed back to become one of our best players.”

Tait was missing a few players whom he’d place in their top 12, both in Houston and Dubai, but they should cycle back in during Hong Kong, Amsterdam and maybe London. And although the World Cup Sevens is five months away, these tournaments serve as a preview to a certain extent.

“We want the competition to grow and become a world game,” Tait reflected on how the competition’s diversified. “New Zealand’s in the circuit; the USA has improved immensely over the last 12 months under Ric Suggitt; Russia is another team that has come up. It’s making the game more entertaining, and it’s making it better for the players. They want to be challenged, but then they’ve got to rise to the challenge. It’s going to be a fight from now on – anyone can really win it.”

Canada is one of those teams, just not in Houston.

[Photo: Canada during the Netherlands loss. Paul Rudman photo]