

## Ariz. State up to Cal Challenge

Written by Pat Clifton

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The PAC Rugby Conference begins its maiden season Saturday, as Arizona State visits Cal on the newly reopened Witter Field. Cal is undefeated so far this season, going 4-0 in 40-minute games at the Dennis Storer Classic and walloping Santa Clara 81-0 and Stanford 176-0 in full matches.

The Sun Devils haven't yet played a game this year, but they did score a win over rival Arizona in December.

"We've been working very hard. Obviously, Cal is a challenge, but I think we've got a much better squad than last year," said Arizona State coach Gary Lane. "The commitment level has been fantastic, and the guys are motivated to do the best they can do against Cal's squad. We're familiar with the team."

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Cal beat ASU 59-7 last February in Tempe, Ariz., but Lane says the game was closer than the score line indicates.

“It was a highly competitive game. I think we played well for the first 60 and ran out of steam for the last 20, and a yellow card didn’t help either,” Lane said.

The Sun Devils did manage to knock off Cal at the PAC 7s tournament in the fall, and they return 19 of the 23 guys who suited up against the Bears last February.

Juniors Adam Sandstrom and Eric Rygiel, former Junior All Americans, are two returners who lead from the front. Sandstrom captains the side from fullback and Rygiel helps guide the pack from the second row. Arizona State has added some more U20s flavor this season, too, in Sione Letoi.

Letoi was on the Junior World Trophy-winning U20s team last summer and has been involved in camp this winter. He is a utility back who could slot in well at flyhalf or either center positions.

“His go-forward is exceptional. His defensive structure, work and tracking is exceptional. There really aren’t too many holes in his game,” said Lane of Letoi. “He came back from the U20 camp a better athlete and a better player, and I think we’ve taken that experience and really helped him bank some more tools, and I think he just keeps growing as a player and maturing as a player.”

Another Sun Devil who participated in U20 camp this winter was wing Ryan Spiwak of Redondo Beach, Calif. Add in speedy freshman Peter Ondi, who has turned heads while playing with Union County High School and Old Blue in the Northeast, and the Sun Devils have a very dangerous backline. So does Cal.

“We’ve never beaten [Cal], but we have a great group of guys who are working hard to make it a competitive game,” said Lane. “The win over Arizona just enthused our guys and made us realize we’ve got a pretty good team and we’ve got to keep it going.”

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