

OPSB Prepares for SFGG in RSL Semi

Written by
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Old Puget Sound Beach received RUGBY Magazine's award for Club of the Year in 2010 because of their performance in the National Club 7s Championship, their undefeated fall in British Columbia, and their making the Super League playoffs for the first time despite losing one of their best players to injury in their opening match.

That award certainly put some pressure on the club to take a step forward this year, and it looked like they might not make that step, when another key player, Isimeli Daveta, went down injured, and out for the season, in their opening league game again.

Daveta had been moved from wing to flyhalf to open up the OPSB attack, and now he was gone. Player-coach Evan Haigh, the guy who was injured last year, said the club has done a great job bouncing back.

"Our run in 7s was a good example of the kind of club and program we're trying to build," said

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Haigh, who has returned to play superbly at fullback. "Without our key player we survived the first day and then when we got him back we won. It shows the attitude the club has, and we know we can overcome anything."

Haigh said the team has a chip on its shoulder.

"Nobody expects anything of us, ever," he said. "But we're willing to rise above it. We realize we have got a lot to blow our trumpet on, particularly in the 15s game, but we're a solid team across the board."

By moving Daveta from wing to flyhalf, OPSB opened up a wing spot, and that was claimed by Bobby Fitzpatrick. While defenses worried about Fili Botitu on the one wing (and well they should as he led the Super League in tries), Fitzpatrick's scoring touch was almost as good.

"Fitzpatrick loves the challenge and loves people writing him off," said Haigh. "You've not seen the best from this backline. We had a really good game against Denver, but we can do better. When we do click, we're going to be very dangerous."

It doesn't hurt to have Alipate Tuilevuka at inside center. The team captain is an enormously unselfish player despite being the only Eagle on the squad, and that gives other backs the opportunity to flourish.

Meanwhile, up front is where OPSB might have something over SFGG. Certainly the Beach Dogs' scrum is superior to that of Golden Gate. Is that enough for a win?

"Well I can tell you we aren't going to be knocking the ball on on purpose to get a scrum," said Haigh. "I think it's a mistake to focus on one aspect, such as the scrum. Golden Gate is a complete side. There are chinks in their armor, but how big those chinks are and whether you can expose them is another matter. There are other areas, such as the lineouts, defense, and kicking, where if we don't perform, we're going to find ourselves in trouble."

Down I-5 a piece SFGG Coach Paul Keeler acknowledges that pack-down time was a concern for his club.

"Of course we worked on it, and we addressed some things I think will make us improved in that area," he said. "We'll see."

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Golden Gate's lineout, with Danny LaPrevotte and Samu Manoa the jumpers and Chris Biller on the money with his throws, has been clicking well.

"We are just focused on what we do," said Keeler. "I look at film of the other team, but not much. I spend a lot more time working on what we can do to perform."

Each teams has some players who keep doing their jobs without many accolades. For OPSB, Josh Osborn up front and Albert Jenkins at second row are those types.

Osborn is a technician in the front row and has been a key part of why OPSB will feel confident in tight. Meanwhile Jenkins is simply a tackling machine.

For SFGG, there aren't as many simply because their players – Manoa, LaPrevotte, Biller, Volney Rouse, Mile Pulu, Folau Niua – are simple more well-know. It seems a little odd to note a former Eagle as an unsung player, but Mose Timoteo is the glue for the entire squad and continues to play excellent rugby at scrumhalf. Meanwhile addition Bruce Thomas has been outstanding at blindside flanker, joining La Prevotte and Manoa in the best back row in the league.

Note: Mile Pulu is scheduled to play for SFGG after it became clear he could not travel with the USA 7s team had he been selected.