The DI season starts in Texas Saturday, as the Austin Huns host the Dallas Harlequins in a match between a team on the rise and a team that is somewhat descending. The Huns are still relatively new to DI, while the Harlequins' top side is back in DI for the first time after spending several seasons in the now defunct Super League.

These teams aren't unfamiliar with each other, though, as they've had a regular fixture through the years. Dallas won both their spring and fall matches with the Huns last season.

"Even when we were in DII, I made a point of scheduling them every year. Mike Engelbrecht and John Dale have been very accommodating, and frankly, supportive of our club's development through the years," said Huns forwards coach and director Kirk Tate.

"We've got a long history of competing against them, and we've seen ourselves get closer and closer over the last few years, so we're confident."

Austin picked up some of that confidence last spring, when they had the Kansas City Blues pushed up against the ropes in a playoff game in Kansas City. The Blues escaped the upset and saw their season ended by eventual champ Belmont Shore by just two points.

"It gave us a lot of confidence. I mean, we have a lot of confidence coming into this season," said Tate. "We're real excited about going into the season. We did a lot of recruiting this fall. We've got 100 registered players right now, and I think that we've got more depth than we've ever had, so competition for spots has got guys excited, and I think it should bode well."

Dallas, on the other hand, has dealt with a fair amount of attrition over the offseason.

“We’ve had some significant turnover…We only had one cup game in the fall here, so it’s kind of hard to get people to commit to the fall when there’s nothing being played, so that’s another issue we’re dealing with. More people will be available in the spring, I’m hoping,” said Harlequins coach Michael Engelbrecht.

“We’ve had retirements, we’ve had people move away. We’ve actually had some long time players from overseas who actually returned overseas.”

Engelbrecht says the turnover can’t be pinned on the demise of the Super League.

“I don’t think there’s any attrition due to that. I think, in some ways, it’s almost something that’s helping us, because there’s players that are thinking because we’re a Super League team they’re not good enough to go to us, so they’ll actually go somewhere else. Now we’re a DI team they think they have a better shot of playing on the first side.”

While a guy who has been fantastic for the Quins the last several seasons, Gonzalo Ruiz, is gone (now playing with the Frisco Griffins), a few promising players have joined the club.

One is Eric Luikens, who starred for the University of Texas the last few years. He’s the one who intercepted a Cal pass and scored in the quarterfinal of the CRC in June before playing 7s with The Woodlands Exiles. He’s dealing with a sports hernia and a hamstring injury, but could play Saturday.

Another new guy comes from the DII ranks, David Keane from the University of North Texas. He’ll be starting at scrumhalf against the Huns.

And an Englishman working in Dallas, Michael Singleton, will make his Harlequin debut at No. 8, though he’s normally a hooker.

“Very robust player, great rugby IQ,” said Engebrecht, describing Singleton, “so I think he’s going to bring a lot to us just because of his rugby IQ.”

Tate says it’s not necessarily individual players that you have to worry about with Dallas, rather it’s the team’s style of play.

“Anytime you play the Quins, the real challenge is keeping your work rate up around the park and getting into your defensive structure,” he said. “They play a fast recycle and offloading game, and if you start to flag and not get around the pitch, they will find those gaps and take advantage.”