

New OPSB Coach Ready to Get Hands Dirty

Written by Alex Goff
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After opening their quasi-independent league season with a sobering 35-7 loss to SFGG in January, Old Puget Sound Beach will be getting back on the horse this weekend as they visit the East Palo Alto Bulldogs.



OPSB will play a six-match schedule against NorCal opponents to secure an acceptable competitive season in order to enter the playoffs. Having lost to SFGG already, they know they have to turn in the results going forward.

It's likely that will happen, in part because a number of players have now joined the squad and are ready to play – which was not the case against SFGG Jan 5.

Suliasi Tamaivena, Kellen Gordon, Ratu Rinakama, Simone Ratukalou, Ben Gollings, and more are now on the roster. But more important than any one player is probably the addition of new Head Coach Justin Fitzpatrick. With Evan Haigh concentrating on the Serevi Olympic Development Program, OPSB has brought in the 39-year-old former Ireland prop to coach the team.

It's a bit of a departure for OPSB, which has been a run-and-gun team for years, but now brings in a former international tight five forward with 26 caps to take the helm.

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"I am excited to be here and be part of a talented group of players and help them grow," Fitzpatrick told RUGBYMag.com. "They've done very well over the last couple of seasons, and for me this is a good opportunity to see a different country, a different league, and see what we could do."

Fitzpatrick will lead the team this weekend after having run the squad through two sessions. He doesn't know all the players, but he does know a few (he actually played with Aaron Fry).

"I have an overall impression of the team, and there are some incredibly athletic, powerful athletes across the whole team," he said. "You're dealing with some great individual specimens."

Fitzpatrick is working closely with Haigh, and said he won't be making any radical changes. "It's just about evolving what's in place. I've been given the team, but it would be unfair for me to pick a side because I don't know names and faces. I am trying to prepare them for the match and we'll see what's working, what's not, and move on with a plan in place. The team's style of rugby is not dissimilar to the way that I see it."

As a prop, Fitzpatrick will certainly bring a new viewpoint for tight five play. He said he is impressed with the forwards he has.

"The scrum is something I took a lot of pride and pleasure in, both as a player and a coach," he said. "There are certainly a couple of guys who could step up. Rugby is on the verge of booming in this region, See the great work that Serevi's doing and the Seattle and OPSB clubs coming together."

Fitzpatrick is clearly unafraid to jump in and get started.

"I have been itching to get my feet on the ground and get involved," said the new OPSB coach. "I am not a shrinking wallflower ... I like to get involved and get my hands dirty. It's not a

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traditional buildup, but sure, why not?"