

Portland Cherishes DII Win

Written by Jackie Finlan
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Portland's story is one we hear often. It's their first trip to the Women's DII Club nationals, and they're overwhelmed by what unfolds – the uptick in play, lack of recovery over three days of games. The good teams will let that experience mold their future expectations and rely on this past weekend as impetus to improve.



But Portland isn't going away empty handed. The Pigs defeated the Atomic Sister 20-5 in the 7th place game.

"That was our main thing: We're not eighth," Portland captain Elizabeth Hankins joked. "We're just happy to be here."

But that's not to say that Portland didn't come to Ft. Myers, Fla., with the intention of winning it all, but the odds were stacked against them. Aside from the fact that they were new to the competition, they are a young team, having only been in existence for four years. The team has players from 18-36, with the mean age settling in the early 20s. But that dearth of experience didn't just come in terms of players' time on the field, it also came in terms of preparation.

"We had a lot of our key players who ended up not being able to make it," Hankins said. "And we had a really long stretch between the Pacific Coast Championship, which was four weeks ago, and nationals. We didn't have a game that whole time, so it was just practice. We were being too relaxed and then we came here. We had to play up to something we're not used to and had to adjust throughout the tournament."

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Portland began with a 20-12 loss to Ft. Miami, but were commended for their excellent rucking and scrummaging, despite their smaller size. Saturday saw a 39-0 loss to Norfolk, setting them up for the 7th place match against Albuquerque, which dropped a 20-3 quarterfinal to Beantown II and 20-5 consolation semi to Las Vegas.

Penalties also plagued Portland's first two days of play.

"It's nice to have referees who know what they're doing," said Hankins, who herself slotted two penalties against Albuquerque. "Sometimes it's iffy out there in the Pacific Northwest, where rugby isn't as popular. We got a lot of penalties that we're not used to having because the refs are calling what you're doing wrong, so we had to adjust to that."

Portland found their game on the final day, getting great leadership out of lock and try-scorer Tauna Soderquist, one of the fittest forwards on the field. Brett Zimmerman was also extremely effective at outside center, scoring two tries from one of the several positions she's played all season.

"It was more that we traveled all this way, we have nothing to lose, so let's leave it all there," Hankins commented on what changed on day three. "We focused on getting back to basics and playing the rugby we know how to play."

Albuquerque had the same philosophy and challenged Portland with some hard-striking runners.

"Every time they got the ball they were coming hard up the field, and our defense really stepped it up," Hankins said. "That was probably the major difference between the other games. Everyone was on their tackles, spreading the field and just not letting them get through."

Portland learned a lot about what it takes to plan at nationals, as well as all the preparation that must occur to make sure they're ready for the competition. But they also won at nationals, and returning home with a win on the championship stage is unforgettable.

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