

Tulsa Upends Bombers, Omaha in St. Louis

Written by Pat Clifton
Tuesday, 19 April 2011 07:48



Tulsa won its way to the West semifinals over the weekend with victories over the Omaha GOATS and St. Louis Bombers. Because multiple teams dropped out of the West-Central DII league over the offseason, the five remaining teams played each other once during the regular season, with the top four moving on to a four-team playoff.

Tulsa Upends Bombers, Omaha in St. Louis

Written by Pat Clifton
Tuesday, 19 April 2011 07:48

As the undefeated top seed, the Bombers hosted the event and played the fourth-seeded Ramblers in one semifinal. The cross-town rivalry was won by the Bombers big, 50-5 in the fall, but it was a little closer this time around, with the former Super League club winning 31-6.

In the other semifinal, Tulsa shutout Omaha, who reached the National quarterfinal last season before being bounced by San Francisco Golden Gate. Tulsa had just played the GOATS to a much closer, 18-15, win a few weeks before, so it's clear the Oklahoma club was on top of its game. That carried over on Sunday, as Tulsa defeated St. Louis 25-23 to take the league crown.

The Bombers played a lot of rugby in the spring against high-level competition. They beat Palmer and the Chicago Blaze, the DI and DII champs of the Midwest, respectively, and played DI Cincinnati and the Kansas City Blues competitively. They also led Tulsa until about five minutes to go in the final, when Roger Gassett nailed the game-winning penalty to end the Bombers' spring season. Perhaps the Bombers just ran out of gas.

But kudos to Tulsa, who have learned to win the close game. Three times this spring they've won by three points or less in league play, and in each of those games, the foot of Gassett has proven an asset.

"No doubt. He's gone through patches, but here's times I'll say just have a go man," said Tulsa coach Steve Ingram. "He gets a little bit nervous at times. Heck, I think I believe in him more than he believes in himself, but I'd go to him all day, and I wouldn't even hesitate."

Tulsa took the opposite scheduling approach of St. Louis. They played sparing games in the fall, participating instead in tournaments like Aspen Ruggedfest and Little Rock, winning the latter. And this spring they played just one non-league match, which they won against the Dallas Harlequins B-side.

The approach paid off, and Tulsa is hoping to reach Nationals for the first time since 2008, when they lost in the quarterfinals. The year before, they lost in the semifinals, but the team has changed a bit since then, and many are just happy to have more guaranteed games.

"This team's got a few veterans left on it, but most of these guys are young fellas," said Ingram, "and we're definitely pumped about it, for sure."