

## Atlanta Old White Hope Third Time's the Charm

Written by Pat Clifton

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Atlanta Old White won its third-consecutive South 7s title Saturday in Marietta, Ga, defeating Daytona, the Atlanta Renegades, Life and New Orleans along the way.

AOW had struggled early on in the summer due in part to injuries, but they're starting to play their best just when they need to. Something they did on Saturday when they faced Life in the semifinals.

"We probably played, the first half anyway, some of the best rugby we've played the entire season," said AOW coach Brynn Ireland, whose team got off to a 15-0 lead against the Running Eagles before letting Life come back with 14 unanswered points.

"We were very fortunate to come away with a one-point win against a very impressive Life side," he added.

Raising Ireland's brow in the Life match, and throughout the day, were Mike Aaron and Ron Omondi.

"They both put in some crunching tackles in the midfield and caused several turnovers and basically snuffed out a lot of attacking movement in the midfield, especially against Life," the coach said. "They put in some crunching tackles against some really big guys and killed the space for them."

Old White drew New Orleans, the defending DII National Champs, in the final. NOLA reached the final by blanking AOW's cross-town rival Renegades 26-0 in the other semi and emerging from a brutal pool which included Charlotte and Life, 2010 participants at Nationals.

"We were actually pretty skeptical initially, because they had put up some very impressive performances against the likes of the Renegades and Charlottes, so we were very concerned, to be honest," said Ireland of NOLA, who traveled with just 10 players.

"They probably exerted themselves trying to get through to the final, and I think they may have been a little tired at the end of the day. We had 12 guys. We recruited our squad pretty handily."

Atlanta defeated NOLA 24-10 to take the crown and the South's top bid to Nationals, where Ireland thinks if they play their best, they can compete with anyone.

"When we're good, we're absolutely phenomenal, probably as good as any team out there. The one thing we have this year that we've not had in the past is a little bit of depth. We now have a solid squad of 12 players who can take it to the national level.

"We're not as large. We are small and insanely mobile. We like to let the ball do the work, and we'll move the ball across the field as often as we can and hopefully tire out the bigger guys and frustrate them more into making mistakes than trying to take them on physically."

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