

Is the Grand Prix Actually Happening?

Written by Alex Goff & Pat Clifton
Wednesday, 09 January 2013 13:33



“Obviously Bill (Tatham) has been trying to make this happen since 2005 when the sanction was signed with him to do this,” said USA Rugby CEO Nigel Melville. “We’re hopeful that this year he’s closer than he’s ever been...We’re optimistic it will happen.”

Tatham, founder and chairman of Grand Prix Entertainment, has not responded to multiple interview requests from RUGBYMag. But his company has issued a series of press releases over the last several months, announcing that the Grand Prix 7s tournament, which is supposed to be bringing in teams from across the globe to compete for a \$1 million cash prize, will be held at the Home Depot Center in Carson, Calif. and air live on the NFL Network. The NFL’s website also ran the release.

According to the [Grand Prix’s website](#) , the tournament is set for July 12-14, 2013. Melville said he believed 26 teams had committed to competing.

Most recently, New Zealand Rugby Union Chief Executive Steve Tew and All Blacks 7s coach Gordon Tietjens have recognized New Zealand’s commitment to compete in the Grand Prix. But the team it sends won’t be the All Black Sevens. Fiji has also publicly committed to the tournament, but it’s team won’t be the official Fijian National Team.

New Zealand, the United States, Fiji and other countries who participate in the IRB Sevens World Series are contractually prohibited from entering their official National Teams in another circuit. So, while the United States will be represented at the Grand Prix, should it happen, it won’t be by the Eagles.

Is the Grand Prix Actually Happening?

Written by Alex Goff & Pat Clifton
Wednesday, 09 January 2013 13:33

“[We will] probably have four teams in there. Alex Magleby will select four teams that will represent us, and we’re hoping to do those possibly regionally,” Melville said.

USA Rugby would also lend administrative support to the competition.

“One of our goals is to make sure that it is IRB compliant, so we will help in terms of scheduling, refereeing, training fields, looking after teams’ services and the teams,” said Melville. “We want the teams to come, and to make sure they have an experience they would expect at other tournaments around the world.”

William Tatham, Jr. made his fortune in banking and real estate in Fresno, Calif. Tatham was involved, with his father, William Tatham, Sr., in owning and operating teams in the USFL and WFL.

In 2005, Tatham’s group signed a deal to pay USA Rugby approximately \$250,000 for a five-year window to develop a pro rugby 7s competition. This deal appeared at the time to be very open-ended, allowing Tatham leeway to field 6-a-side or 9-a-side, or any new version of the game he wanted. Concerns were raised within USA Rugby and outside the governing body that the integrity of the game would play second fiddle to low-brow entertainment value.

The vision at one point was a competition to be held in Las Vegas, perhaps even on a specially-laid field on or near the Strip, or indoors.

After the USA 7s tournament moved to Las Vegas, Tatham turned his attention to Rugby League for a time. However, for the past few years, he has been working on this international tournament idea.

The plans have taken some time to come to fruition. In an interview in early 2010 Tatham left a broad hint that the first Grand Prix event would be held around Halloween of that year, but Halloween came and went with no activity.

This time, tickets are on sale (starting at \$112.50 for a three-day package), and, for the first time since Tatham and USA Rugby partnered up seven years ago, the event has a date, teams expecting to compete, a venue, tickets for sale and reputable organizations acknowledging it publicly.