By Jackie Finlan

When the Olympics welcomes 7s to its summer lineup, the women will be making their debut alongside the men, and that fact isn't lost on the organizers of the USA Sevens Collegiate Rugby Championship. In the tournament's second year, the event has added an elite eight-team women's bracket, and each team will see some action inside Chester, Pa.'s PPL Park.

The competition spans three days, from Friday-Sunday, June 3-5. The round-robin portion of the tournament will take place on Friday at a to-be-determined location, followed by the quarterfinals on Saturday, and semifinals and championship on Sunday. The weekend play will take place inside the 18,500-capacity stadium.

Fortunately for the women, there's a nice concentration of quality teams in relative proximity to Philadelphia. DI National Champion Penn State leads the charge and are the heavy favorites if they can remain healthy and stave off burnout. PSU's roster boasts USA 7s Eagles Sadie Anderson, Deven Owsiany and Lisa Henneman, not to mention newly named USA Women's head coach Pete Steinberg. There will be no need for Penn State to call upon outside 7s coaching expertise, as Steinberg has led developmental USA 7s sides.

Five of the remaining teams are in RugbyMag.com's Top 25 DI schools - Army, Brown, Navy, Virginia and North Carolina. Princeton also got the nod, which may have had something to do with 7s guru Emil Signes coaching the Ivy League school. Even though Princeton has advanced to the MARFU playoffs this April, it's unlikely that the team will make it past the quarterfinals, but that could be a boon as far as the CRC is concerned. With Signes leading the charge, Princeton will have more time to break its 15s' habits and craft a 7s strategy that is foreign to most collegiate women's players.

Temple is the lone DII team in the lineup, but the national finalist has every reason to do well at the CRC. Based in Philadelphia, the Owls want to give their hometown fans a good show.

"The Temple community will jump on board with this," Temple women's coach Owen Jones said. "The men's team is also participating in the CRC, so this is not just a Temple Women's achievement; it's a recognition of the entire university. Additionally, I think the entire city is going to support the event. We have teams all over the place, from U-15s through men's and women's clubs. There are over 45 boys' and 20 girls' high school teams in the area; La Salle, UPenn, Drexel and St. Joeseph's universities all have city-based teams. That's why the tournament came to Philadelphia; it will be well attended and the local story."

Temple, like its counterparts, are solely focused on 15s right now, but coaches continue to evaluate players who might have the skill set for 7s. "I don't want to put a team on the field who are going to revert to a 15s style of play," Jones said. "We are going to field a team that plays open, fast, exciting 7s. At the conclusion of our 15s season, those girls selected will practice together and enter one or two local 7s tournaments leading up to the CRC to work on our style of play, fitness and communication."

"We are very excited to be included in the CRC event," Brown coach Kerri Heffernan said, "but my mind has been entirely on 15s. [Assistant coach and USA Eagle] Emilie Bydwell and I are thinking about how to integrate 7s practice and teaching without disrupting the 15s game. We are also planning to host a 7s tournament on May 21."

Heffernan is fortunate enough to have access to a very experienced 7s coach working with Brown's men's team, and who has been warm and open to working with the women. Outside of Steinberg, Signes and Navy's Sue Parker, former USA Women's 7s coach, the majority of teams don't have a 7s specialist on staff, and will likely need outside help to transition quickly from 15s to 7s. All of the men's teams in last year's tournament recruited 7s coaches to best prepare their squads.

The official draw occurs on April 29, just before the women's DI college round of 16 kicks off. Team previews and predictions will follow.

For more information on the tournament, visit www.usasevenscrc.com .