

SEC 7s Saturday in Montgomery

Written by Pat Clifton

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The Southeastern Collegiate Rugby Conference 7s Championship is Saturday and Sunday in Montgomery, Ala., and 13 of the 14 member schools of the SEC are set to compete, including first-year members Texas A&M and Missouri. Only Vanderbilt is not participating.

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The field is split into four pools, with the top two teams from each pool advancing to the quarterfinals on day two and the champion receiving an automatic bid to Nationals. The bottom team from each pool moves onto the Plate semifinals. Alabama, LSU, Texas A&M, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and Auburn are entering sides into the JV bracket.

Tennessee enters the competition as its reigning champion, having beaten Florida 26-14 in the final last September. LSU and Arkansas reached the semifinals.

The Vols played in the Greensboro, NC leg of the Atlantic Coast Invitational 7s Series earlier this fall and went 3-0 in pool play, beating Appalachian State, Clemson and Virginia, but the knockout rounds were canceled due to weather.

The champs return their biggest play makers, including All American Nic Evans, from last year. He is their main line breaker, but fifth-year players Matt Johnson and Mason Howard add firepower, too. Howard was injured for part of last year, as he suffered a broken hand and took a semester off.

“I look for him to play real well,” said Tennessee coach Marty Bradley. “He’s been practicing real well. He’s probably the one guy that didn’t get a lot of recognition last year that will probably do so this year.”

LSU is also anchored by veterans, veterans who have been targeting this weekend.

“This is basically a lot of the seniors’ main priority because we know now where the country’s going with 7s and that’s basically the future of the sport in the country,” said LSU captain Allen Alongi, “so we want to go out there and hopefully win everything, but if not at least qualify for Nationals, and maybe Philadelphia again.”

LSU played in the Collegiate Rugby Championship two years ago in Philadelphia, but only two Tigers who played in the CRC are still on the team, and Alongi is the only one who will be playing in Montgomery.

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“We’re just basically using what we’ve learned from that tournament, other tournaments we’ve been to and from Jules McCoy,” said Alongi, speaking of former Women’s 7s National Team coach Julie McCoy who coached them in the CRC. “We’ve just been putting that into motion.”

The Tigers have been playing some 15s this fall, but also sprinkling in a couple of under-the-radar 7s tournaments, in which they’ve mostly played club teams. They’ve also committed two practices a week to 7s.

Alongi should be expected to score some tries this weekend, and 15s No. 8 Will Middleton will need to play well if LSU is to be successful. But the Tigers might have a bit of an ace on the bench, too, in U20s hooker Cameron Falcon.

“It’s going to take at least two people to bring him down,” said Alongi of Falcon. “If they over commit, that will definitely leave an advantage on the side. He’s going to be an impact player, for sure.”

Newcomer Texas A&M should be considered a serious title contender. The Aggies won the Allied Rugby Conference tournament just last week, beating Colorado State and Oklahoma along the way. A&M has big-time players in Connor Mills, Brian Guillen and Jan Young.

Arkansas could also be dangerous, having finished a close second to Lindenwood at the Heart of America tournament last month, and Florida has had some success in the Florida 7s series this fall, despite losing a bunch of talent following a good showing at the CRC in June.

Pool A

Tennessee

Georgia

South Carolina

Pool B

Florida

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Mississippi State
Kentucky

Pool C

LSU
Alabama
Missouri

Pool D

Arkansas
Auburn
Ole Miss
Texas A&M