

Wisconsin 7s Keeps Winning

Written by Pat Clifton

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Wisconsin keeps proving itself on the 7s field, and after defending its title at Big Ten 7s Saturday in Columbus, Ohio, the Badgers will return to both the Collegiate Rugby Championship and the USA Rugby National Championships.

For the second year in a row, Wisconsin beat Penn State in the final to win the Big Ten.

“The boys tackled hard. They were really confident in the tackle. We were undersized, so they had to be,” said Wisconsin coach Skip Heffernan.

“Penn State had a couple of really fast guys we were concerned about, and they broke one early to make a game out of it. But we had a couple of pretty big hits defensively and kept it down in their end pretty well.”

Tournament MVP Tom Hemmings ran in two tries in the final and made some of those aforementioned tackles. The English student who arrived in Madison, Wisc. this semester has been lights out for the Badgers in 15s and 7s.

“He just sees the gap and he’s got some acceleration to get through it,” said Heffernan of Hemmings. “He’s deceptively fast. He’s a big, tall lanky guy, but he just sees the field and when he sees the whole he takes the gap.”

Another guy who stepped up was freshman Jack Goss, who took over in the final for injured captain Curtis Shepherd.

“He played the whole 20 minutes. He played great on defense,” said Heffernan of Goss. “It was

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a real team effort and Jack really personified that. Everybody that got asked to step up, did. We got all of our subs in pretty early in the second half, so when we got fresh legs that helped a lot.”

Heffernan said playing in the CRC and National Championships last season has really helped the 7s team grow into the formidable force it is.

“There’s more depth on this team. There’s more good 7s players. Last year we had a couple of real stars in Andrew Hannske and Ben Knight, but now we’ve got a lot of solid players,” he said.

“And the experience of having played in these big tournaments the last couple of years has made a lot of guys better 7s players. We’ve got some experience across the board, and that really helps.”