A vibrant mix of youth and experience will take the field against Italy "A" in Canada's Churchill Cup opening match at Franklin's Gardens on Saturday.

Canadian national senior men's coach Kieran Crowley has put together a side ranging from wholly experienced players like Ed Fairhurst at scrum half and young, budding talents like uncapped Conor Trainor in the centres.

And in the forwards, Crowley has what he believes will be a handy arsenal to combat the eager Italian pack, which he knows will be a strong piece of their game.

"We know it's going to be a real battle," Crowley said. "The Italian team had a press conference today and the players were told there's world cup selection on the line, so they've got something to play for.

"We know it will be tough up front, so we've got to get everything right up front so we can set a platform to express ourselves."

Leading the charge up front is captain Pat Riordan in the front row, alongside props Hubert Buydens and Jason Marshall.

Riordan is the stalwart in the front row, with both Buydens and Marshall massing a combined total of only eight caps, but Crowley is confident these three will be just one asset in a forward pack filled with grit.

With Tyler Hotson and Brian Erichsen combining at lock and Jebb Sinclair, Chauncey O'Toole and Aaron Carpenter prowling at loose, Crowley believes the Canadian forwards have the potential to upset the Italian game plan.

Hotson's 17 caps will balance out Erichsen's three, while Carpenter at No. 8 is a steady anchor for the ever-improving Sinclair and O'Toole on the flanks.

"There's a lot of experience in our forward pack. I'm excited to see how the front row goes, we're looking to see where we're at with them.

"The tight five is solid and in the loose we have Carpenter who's been there a long time. Chauncey O'Toole is an outstanding player and Jebb Sinclair is in the same boat. Both of them have worked really hard over the last few years."

In the backs, Fairhurst's 42 caps will provide a calm and collected approach to unleashing Ander Monro and his exciting back line featuring Phil Mackenzie, Ryan Smith, Trainor, Ciaran Hearn and James Pritchard.

Spattered among the experience of Fairhurst, Monro, Smith and Pritchard are exciting young players which Crowley is keen to test in international waters before having to throw them into the deep end of a world cup.

While Trainor is uncapped, Crowley is confident in the centre's skills and in the ability of the experienced players around him to have a calming effect on the 21-year-old from Vancouver.

"Trainor is making a step up," Crowley said. "He's a pretty level-headed guy. The experienced guys will help the young guys find their feet. He's already got the size, pace and skill."

The bench is a similar story, mixed with youth and experience, as Ryan Hamilton, Andrew Tiedemann, Mitch Gudgeon and Nanyak Dala back up the forward back and Sean White, Mike Scholz and Matt Evans are ready to sub into the back line.

Hamilton has just one cap at hooker, while Tiedemann brings some experience and stability to the front row. Gudgeon will be looking to file into the second row and get some more playing time at the national 15s level, after trading time with the national sevens program.

Dala, an aggressive loose forward, will be looking to get back into the thick of it having not played international rugby since last year.

In the backs, White will be looking to impress as a back up to Fairhurst as the two will likely compete for the position throughout the tournament.

Former Newport Gwent Dragons player Matt Evans is in waiting for Monro, whose match fitness will likely be tested as he was recovering from injury earlier this year.

Finally in the centres, another youthful addition in uncapped Mike Scholz, will be looking to be injected into the 15s mix having already proved potent for the national sevens team earlier this year.

The team has had less than a week to work on set piece and specific systems and Crowley

said this team will act as a yard stick to how their preparation has been so far and what more needs to be done.

"It takes time around defensive systems and those sorts of things," he said. "The trainings have been long to get everyone on the same page. It's coming together.

"This is the best side for this game. There's players coming off injury that we've got to manage. It's about getting the best out of the players on the day."

Canada vs Italy, Saturday June 4, Franklin's Gardens

Canada

1. Hubert Buydens
2. Pat Riordan (Captain)
3. Jason Marshall
4. Tyler Hotson
5. Brian Erichsen
6. Jebb Sinclair
7. Chauncey O'Toole
8. Aaron Carpenter
9. Ed Fairhurst
10. Ander Monro
11. Phil Mackenzie
12. Ryan Smith
13. Conor Trainor
14. Ciaran Hearn
15. James Pritchard

16. Ryan Hamilton
17. Andrew Tiedemann
18. Mitch Gudgeon
19. Nanyak Dala
20. Sean White
21. Mike Scholz
22. Matt Evans