Irish Independent News' Brendan Fanning followed the Eagles during their Churchill Cup preparation in England, and Sunday, after a 44-13 loss to Tonga, his story ran. Go here to read the full story
. Fanning focused on the hurdles the Eagles have to clear because of rugby's amateurism in the States, and the resolve they show in clearing said hurdles.

Late Bloomers

"I started when I was 16 -- which is old, but young by American standards," (Scott) LaValla says. "I actually wanted to play when I was 15 but my mom wouldn't let me because she didn't want me to get hurt, it was an under 19 club and 15 was too young."That tells you something about the lack of opportunity, that a 15-year-old in Washington State didn't have ready access to a team of his peers.

Jersey presentation for Tonga

They do this for every Test and they take it very seriously. The format is that the coach speaks, followed by the captain who then presents the jerseys to his team-mates. It's not easy

to come up with something clever to say every time the team plays a Test match and O'Sullivan sticks to the theme that the world could end tomorrow, so be safe and use very moment.

"If you're lucky you might go on and win another 20 or 30 caps, or you might win none," he says. "So approach this as if it's your last and give it everything."

Captain Todd Clever looks like he is happier playing in front of a crowd than addressing one, but he bristles with passion. "Whether you do this for your wife or girlfriend or family, or for your dog, I dunno -- just dig deep out there tomorrow."

Postmatch dinner

Dinner is fairly sombre but there are new caps to be handed out to Eric Fry, Troy Hall and Tai Enosa. There is a warmth about the congratulations from each of their colleagues that reminds you what team sport is about. No horrendous concoctions are forced down the necks of the debutants. In fact, there is no alcohol at all. They disappear off to bed leaving the coach sharing some raspberry crumble and a jug of water with this correspondent.

O'Sullivan on the American game

"I don't find it difficult," Eddie O'Sullivan says, "and I'll tell you why: I made a mental adjustment coming to the US that this was going to be a part of the job that I didn't have with Ireland. With Ireland I knew that every need would be catered for, every cheque would be written, and if we needed a week off to be paid for then the IRFU never sold the team short in any way. I always felt I was reasonable about it and didn't do anything stupid. But I knew that with America -- as it was in '99 -- you'd have to cut your cloth and there would be other issues to be dealt with. So I got on with it. I'd prefer I didn't have to deal with them but the reality is that I do.

"In some way it's just a different headset about doing the same job. I would hope you get the impression from watching them, even for a brief time, that they're a decent bunch of young fellas who train very hard. They want to learn and there aren't any drama queens, they wouldn't be accepted here. And the staff are a good group of American lads who by and large are doing it because they love it, not because someone is writing them a cheque because most of them don't get a cheque. And that energy gets you over a lot of stuff.

"It goes back to something I've been saying about American rugby: people say to me why do you coach in America, are you stupid going there? And I've said this a thousand times: the problems America have in order to play rugby are a multitude and if we had half the problems in Europe we'd probably play something else. They overcome immense geographical, climatic, financial issues to play the game. These fellas do this stuff every week, it's not a big deal. Like, fellas trying to get off work to get a flight that they paid for themselves to go and play a league match. People would scratch their heads and ask why would you do that?"