

There was a College 7s Tournament ...

Written by Alex Goff

Tuesday, 07 June 2011 18:52



A few thoughts on the USA 7s Collegiate Rugby Championships.

Chester, Pa. isn't exactly the Riviera, but the town did the job. PPL Park is a wonderful facility and a beautiful stadium, with comfortable seats and a nice roof for the fans so they don't bake or soak. The stadium is right on the Delaware River under the shadow of the Commodore Barry Bridge, which provides a lovely setting.

The City of Philadelphia and the **local media** welcomed the tournament with open arms. The hotel staff were nice, there was a banner welcoming players, the event had billboards around the city, and the local TV stations and newspapers previewed the tournament repeatedly, and reported on it after the fact.

As I checked in to my hotel the lady at the desk said that all the rugby players were "**nice boys, very well behaved**

." This is a contrast to, say San Diego when they hosted the USA 7s, when every person checking in was handed a sternly-worded note warning guests (specifically, rugby guests) not to trash the rooms.

Ben Gollings, England 7s star, was there and could be found in the fan festival working with kids and helping them play some skills games.

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Dropkick Murphys not only provided a high-energy concert that the fans loved, but they started dead on time.

10,000 fans on Saturday and 7,500 on Sunday flocked to the stadium to watch college 7s. It was an enormous hit, especially compared with the attendance in 2010, which was much lower. Not since the days when some colleges played rugby instead of football in the early part of the 20th Century, has a non-international match on US soil drawn so many people. And this year, it happened twice, with the Cal v. BYU College Premier Final and the June 4 crowd at the CRC both just getting over 10,000.

USA women's 7s coach **Ric Suggitt** said the CRC was more impressive in size and facilities than the tournament he played in during the early years of the IRB World Series.

The play was better. The quality of 7s play compared with the 2010 tournament was much improved. Most of the teams were better, and almost everyone was playing 7s. Once again, the team that won, and the team that won the Challenger Bracket, was the team that most embraced playing 7s.

Arizona played 56 minutes of rugby and gave up exactly one try. Yet, because they were shut out in that one game, in the quarterfinals, their weekend ended early.

Central Washington finished 4th, and ended with a 3-3 record. But it's worth noting that the Wildcats only lost to the three teams that finished ahead of them: Dartmouth, Army and Utah. Two of those losses were by two points.

USA National Panel ref Gareth Morgan **was wrong** to end the Army v. Utah semifinal when he did. Oddly, it was if this writer was set up to see the error. On Saturday morning USA Rugby 7s ref head Pat McNally presented us with a copy of the new USA Rugby 7s refereeing guidelines. On Sunday morning, we had a brief and very pleasant chat with Morgan about refereeing (and avoiding mistakes). Morgan ended up handling the most controversial end to a match, and the guidelines were helpful to us in figuring it all out.

In the match, Army scored with just under a minute left to lead 12-7. As Dave Geib retrieved the ball for the conversion, there appeared to be over 50 seconds left in the game. As Geib took

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his time, Utah captain Blake Miller went up to Morgan to confirm there would be a kickoff. Morgan appeared to say there wouldn't be, Miller argued, the hooter went, and Geib's kick sailed wide.

This is expressly addressed in the guidelines, saying that if more than 40 seconds remain on the clock when a try is scored, the restart should be taken. It's worth remembering that the USA has been hurt by this same type of ruling in 7s. It seems clear in a logical, fair-play kind of way : if a try is scored with time left on the clock, the game should restart. We're not saying Utah would have scored on Army (in 14 minutes they had only done so once) but they deserved the chance. Army performed excellently this weekend, but the ruling at the end of that game was wrong.

Was everyone good? No, not everyone. I thought LSU played some really attractive 7s. I thought Dartmouth's performance in the final was the best collegiate 7s I have ever seen. I thought Utah's dismantling of Cal was one of the best examples of a marriage between individual brilliance and team dedication. (Worth noting, by the way, that Cal was only two weeks removed from the CPD final, and had to be tired; also worth noting, Dartmouth players were in the middle of finals, and most of the athletes spent their non-rugby time studying).

Temple and Ohio State relied too much on one or two players. North Carolina looked unstoppable in their first game, but couldn't quite recapture the magic. Notre Dame did OK but played too much 15s style (and weren't big enough to get away with it). Boston College just struggled.

But Temple had the **best fans**, as they put in time and effort and noise to cheer for their teams. For that alone they should be asked back. (Who else should be invited? That's another column.)

Teams ... right, the women. Army was brilliant and athletic. Penn State was teamwork but not the pace. Temple put in possibly the try of the tournament when two players ran the length of the field. When one was caught, the other was right there to pick up and score.

The women didn't get on NBC; that was a shame. The play was good, and will be even better next year.

There will be a next year, at PPL Park and on NBC. That's a great thing. This event has revolutionized college rugby, and also opened up the door to college rugby players to also

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become college rugby fans.