



When I saw the change in the College Premier Division brackets, a few thoughts ran through my head (no, really, it has been known to happen):

1. Good. On a purely rugby measurement, it's good to mix up the conferences as much as possible.

and ...

2. Ah hubris. I see you raising your head again.

There is a pervasive approach to rugby playoffs in this country that goes something like this: "Our region is better than your region, and winning a championship isn't enough. We want to prove that our #2 is better than your #2 (or #1) and our #3 is better than your #3 (and #2 and even #1)."

The great impenetrable fortress of that way of thinking is the Pacific Coast Rugby Football Union. They don't just want to win, they want to show everyone that the region is dominant. (Sometimes this hubris gets carried away ... I remember one communication a few years ago crowing about PCRFU national champions which took credit for the Coast Guard Academy,

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which is, of course, in New England.)

So if we had stayed with the original plan, with Rugby East #1 playing Mid-South #2 and Mid-South #1 playing Rugby East #2, we would have had at least two teams not from the Pacific Coast in the final four. (Most would pick Army and Life or Arkansas State for those spots ... but there are plenty of other contenders.)

And in the other half, well, you know what we'd have ... probably Cal and BYU. Now they could have jiggered the semifinal brackets easily to ensure BYU and Cal wouldn't meet in the semis (although I don't think either is too keen to face Life). But that's not good enough for those on the West Coast.

They want it all. They want to prove they are not only the denisen of the best, but the denisen of the second-, third- and fourth-best too.

This new playoff structure, at the cost of demanding more travel from teams on short notice, ensures the possibility of an all-PCRUFU semifinals of BYU, Utah, St. Mary's and Cal.

Now I am not saying that's a foregone conclusion. There are enough speed bumps to change that lineup. But the second thought that came to my mind when I saw this lineup of playoffs was exactly this. The guys in the Pacific Coast will love this. This gives the teams from that region a shot at not only winning, but, to use some Olympic parlance, sweeping the medals.

Because, remember, rugby isn't about participation, celebrating the true student-athlete, or removing obstacles for play; it's about domination, and making sure everyone knows who dominated.

That being said, it's not an unreasonable bracket. Somebody has to go on the road, and if you have neutral sites for the semis, somebody likely has to travel a lot. In this particular case, eastern teams have to travel a lot, which is rough, and teams in the West are within driving distance possibly of all their games. But somebody would have to travel. Certainly it would have been nice to find a non-thunderstorm-plagued venue further East (if I could think of one not on

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the coast of the Pacific Ocean).

But it's a good playoff list, and raises some interesting questions. Can Utah (or whomever) go East and win May 7? Could Life or Arkansas State be nasty hosts to the Pacific runners-up? Intriguing questions all ...