

Eagle Eye: A Home of One's Own for 7s

Written by

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 18:49



Staring in the face of an unsuccessful attempt to build on the momentum of the USA women's 7s team's 3rd-place finish in the 2009 World Cup, and the USA men's 7s team's reaching the final of the 2010 Adelaide 7s, the USA 7s programs may have to start thinking along different lines in order to start the drive to an Olympic medal in 2016.

The timeline is not getting any longer, and in fact is shrinking faster than the passage of time. The Pan Am games are in just over four months, giving the USA Men's 7s team precious little time to formulate a team (to Olympic eligibility standards) that could win a Gold Medal over Canada and Argentina.

Then after that, there's a World Cup in 2013 and Olympic Qualification, probably in 2014. Neither the USA Men or Women, given recent results, should be expected to achieve a place in the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio unless the field is expanded to at least 12 and North America gets two seeds.

And given that the Government of Canada has, through their Own the Podium program, given the Canadian 7s programs \$1.6 million to ensure that their players can devote time to training for 2016 success, we can be sure we're not keeping pace with our neighbors, much less the rest of the world.

In Canada, despite the massiveness of the country and it's vociferous provincialism (literal in

Eagle Eye: A Home of One's Own for 7s

Written by

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 18:49

this case – each province knows for a fact they are the true, tough, frost-bitten Canadians and the rest are just pretenders), there's little argument about locating elite training in one area. You know, for example, that if you are serious about 7s in Canada, you better be spending a lot of time in Victoria or Vancouver, BC. There really isn't a debate.

We need to be prepared to think along similar lines.

Without a large influx of cash from the government, American rugby players will again have to play catchup. But what they lack in public funding they make up with a large group of athletes, including a growing population of 1st- and 2nd-generation Polynesian athletes who love rugby, and a privately-funded, nationally-recognized collegiate 7s development pathway that was created out of whole cloth last spring by RUGBYMag.com's employers, USA 7s, and NBC.

In addition, the All Americans will play as a 7s team this summer, and the High School All Americans started playing 7s in February, thanks once again to USA 7s, which started the Las Vegas Invitational. State high school games and organizations from Washington to Iowa to New York have embraced 7s as the Olympic ideal of full contact team sports, something Americans should fall in love with, if they get the chance.

The dream should be obvious: a central location for our 7s players to live and train; a new enthusiasm for 7s in the community, high school and collegiate ranks creates athletes who know a little bit about 7s when they get to their 20s; the USA men play in the IRB circuit, the USA women create their own circuit (Dubai, Las Vegas, Hong Kong, Amsterdam); both senior teams create secondary teams (the Cougars, the Falcons, whatever you wish to call them) that go to non-IRB tournaments, especially in the Caribbean and South America, to get international experience; the All Americans and High School All Americans continue to play 7s, not just once a year, but in select tournaments (Las Vegas Invitational, New York 7s, Cape Fear). And we give all of those players somewhere to go, when they can, to train for the Olympics.

It's not out of the realm of possibility that the USA teams could establish their own 7s-specialist city in which to start this 7s dream. The obvious location is, of course, San Diego. The Olympic Training Center is in Chula Vista, which is just outside the city. USA 7s Men's Coach Al Caravelli has a residence in San Diego. I don't know of USA 7s Women's Coach Ric Suggitt would move to the region, but I highly doubt he's dead set against the idea.

Eagle Eye: A Home of One's Own for 7s

Written by

Wednesday, 15 June 2011 18:49

I also highly doubt every player in the pipeline could move there, but certainly some could. And, as we've seen, there are rugby players and football crossovers who are willing to move just about anywhere if it means an Olympic dream. Certainly any pool of 20 players in one place, training regularly under the national team coach and working part-time with the help of local rugby contacts, will get better much faster than anyone doing the old Tuesday-Thursday grind.

We can't wait for USOC money, or sponsorship money, or any major windfall, unless we are willing to take charge of the situation ourselves. Good for Canada for their Own the Podium program. In America, we need to make our own opportunities.

Establish an unofficial USA Olympic Rugby Training Center somewhere (we're saying it should be San Diego, but you could argue for Las Vegas, Denver, Seattle, or a bunch of other places, too);

Establish a formal and reportable season not only for the USA men, but the women, their developmental teams, and the age-grade teams;

Show the USOC, the OTC, and everyone else that the USA 7s team is in business, and therefore is deserving of corporate and public/private support.

Own the Podium. That's nice. How about we, as a rugby nation, own our own future.