

Eagles: Hong Kong Plate Champs

by Paul Andrew

Hong Kong Government Stadium April 5 & 6, 1986

The 11th Annual Hong Kong Sevens had concluded. A crack Chinese Pipe Marching Band stepped smartly onto the field. Hundreds of kids swarmed around the all-conquering New Zealand All Blacks who had just dispatched the French Barbarians in the Cup Final, 32-12.

It was All Black-style rugby adapted to sevens and sevens will never be the same again. The Kiwis are taking it seriously. They conquered Sydney, and now Hong Kong.

Nudging their way through the crowd, the All Blacks accepted the Championship Cup at the sponsors box.

Eagles Win Plate

Not long before, the U.S. Eagles made the same triumphant trek up into the stands to accept the Plate Division Trophy for their 24-18 victory over Canada and to receive congratulations from the tournament sponsors. One satisfied observer was Burton Levin, American Consulate General to Hong Kong. For his four years in that post, Levin has been a sevens spectator. "Just to watch the Eagles," he said.

The Eagles, with the Plate hoisted high, had their victory lap around the field. Someone produced an American flag and kept pace with the team as they passed in front of the 32,000 roaring rugby enthusiasts.

The flag, it turned out, came from the U.S.S. Cimarron, a Navy oiler. Her skipper, Commander Dave Lines, presented the flag and the ship's plaque to Dick Smith, Eagle manager, before the Sunday night festivities.

At those festivities, a dinner to end all dinners, Tommy Smith



Hong Kong Eagles (kneeling L-R) Tommy Smith, Mike Purcell, Charlie Wilkinson, Denis Shanagher, Mark Gaetjen; (standing) Steve Finkel, Brian Vizard, John Fowler, Gary Lambert, Steve Gray (coach).

was awarded the Leslie Williams Trophy for "The Best and the Fairest." By winning that award, Tommy joined the company of past recipients like internationals Les Cusworth (England) and Mark Ella (Australia).

Papua New Guinea Wins Bowl

Mark's brother, Glen Ella, was another winner. He coached Papua New Guinea to the Bowl Championship with a 22-10 victory over Sri Lanka. Ella, who left the Wallabies to accept the temporary coaching position, skipped along with his team on the lap of honor. "The lap of honor with the boys felt just as good as when I went round after winning here with Australia," he said.

Format

The 24-team tournament is divided into eight, three-team pools. Each pool plays a round robin and the most successful team proceeds to the quarter-

finals of the Cup competition. The team which places second proceeds to the Plate and the least successful to the Bowl competition.

CUP All Blacks

In their quest for a first ever Hong Kong Sevens crown, the All Blacks continued playing as they had in Sydney, where they won the World Sevens Championship two weeks earlier.

Prelims

Included in Pool E, the All Blacks made their way into the Cup quarter-finals by cruising by Indonesia 36-0 and then devastating host Hong Kong, 42-0.

Hong Kong, which fielded their best team ever, were completely outclassed.

As captain Richard Pearson admitted afterwards: "We never got anywhere near it. We never got any possession. Nothing.

"Even when it seemed like we were starting something positive they'd get the ball away and quickly reverse the roles. They were very clever — and they were very professional.

"It seemed like they were playing it as they would a Test match. They were very hard. They play a different game. A very tough one."

The following day the All Black machine continued to trample everything in its path, beating Tonga in the quarter finals (28-0) and then trouncing the highly regarded Fijians in the semis, 28-6.

French Barbarians

The All Blacks' opponent in the Cup final were the French Barbarians, a team perhaps motivated by injured pride. Earlier on it had been rumored that the French would not be invited back in 1987 because the Hong Kong administrators felt they had sent a "weak side."

Prelims

Situated in Pool D, the French Barbarians had an easy opening day, recording victories over the Solomon Islands (28-0) and Taipei (26-0).

Blacks completely dominated from the opening whistle. They tackled well, handled superbly and had the speed to capitalize on all opportunities.

Fly-half Wayne Smith notched a hat-trick of tries, and Zin Brooke, Mark Brooke-Cowden, David Kirk and Frano Botica grabbed one apiece with the other four points coming from the boot of Smith.

Two tries by French international Thierry Janeczek, both converted by Patrick Bonal, made the score more respectable — but, in all honesty, there was only one team in it.

French Barbarians	New Zealand
Rodriguez	Botica
Cabannes	Brooke-Cowden
Janeczek	Brooke
Fourniols	Clamp
Ceccillon	Kirk
Puechlestrad	Shelford
Bonal	Smith

PLATE United States

United States 36, Singapore 0

On their sixth trip to Hong Kong, the U.S. finally came back with some hardware. They won the Plate Championship and high praise from the international rugby community with a 24-18 victory over North American rival, Canada.

After watching Singapore bow to the exciting Fijians 40-0, it was decided to take a chance on the two new Eagles: rangy, Brian Vizard, a standout with this year's Junior Eagles, and ERU winger, Mark Gaetjen. The veterans weren't concerned. When the team came together the previous week in San Francisco, and scrimmaged Cal and the BATS, they realized the selectors had come up with a solid sevens players.



Eagle Tommy Smith was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player. (Photo-C. Lambert)

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In the past there was always a player or two who wasn't ready to handle the Sevens pace at Hong Kong. But successful practices in Hong Kong against the Irish Wolfhounds on Wednesday, and the French Barbarians on Thursday, gave the team a feeling of confidence.

First Half

Tommy Smith opened with two successive shallow kicks which were called back. The third kick went 10 and was fielded by Mahwood. Purcell got possession, passed to Vizard who fired a 20-yard football pass to Lambert by the touchline. Lambert broke to Singapore's 20, cut back and bulled over a tackler to score the first try under the posts. Smith's kick was good and the Eagles led 6-0.

Chin's kick was short and Singapore won possession on the scrum that followed. Purcell, however, dislodged the ball and raced 35 meters to score Smith's kick bounced off the cross bar and was no good (10-0).

Smith received Chin's next kickoff, passed to Lambert, out to Wilkinson, and back to Lambert who scored in the corner. Smith's conversion was wide left (14-0).

Second Half

Vizard took the kick, transferred to Wilkinson, who spun to Smith. Smith exploded straight up the middle and scored a converted try before the second half was barely underway (20-0).

Following the kickoff, a scrum was called. Singapore took the heel, and started a passing exchange which marked their first real possession of the match. Smith got the ball back after downing Ibrahim, shoved it to Wilkinson who found Purcell open. Purcell burst 40 yards to score. The kick was good (26-0).

Singapore's deep kick was fielded by Smith and the ball changed hands 4 times — Smith to Lambert, back to Smith, to Vizard, and back to Lambert who scored. The play covered the length of the field and Smith chipped the conversion through (32-0).

Vizard received Ibrahim's kick, fed Shanagher on a scissors to the blind side and Shanagher scooted 50 yards along the touchline to score in the corner (36-0).

Coach Steve Gray

Coach Steve Gray said: "Vizard played super. He was all over the field." Gray was also delighted with Mark Gaetjen's efforts.

"We're attacking more, going



Mike Purcell finishing off a try.

(Photo-D. Fowler)

Fowler took Vizard's slot.

First Half

It was the final match of the day as Fiji kicked deep to Smith. Shortly thereafter Nawalu got it back on a scissors move, dummied and kicked high from the Eagle 40. Ravouvou streaked down, handled the bounce, and scored under the posts. Talawadua converted and it was Fiji 6-0.

Minutes later the Eagles muffed a Fiji penalty kick. Lau-lau recovered the loose ball, burst for the corner and scored. The crowd loved it. The kick was short. Fiji 10, Eagles 0.

Smith kicked off, Fiji worked wide, and Lau-lau broke loose. He had an open teammate outside but kept it himself and glided in for the try. The kick was

forward, running over people," said Gray. "That's our plan: we're fired up but controlled. We don't want to hold back." Gray added: "Having nine good players for the first time is vital to sevens rugby. The quality of this team should stay the same no matter who is in there. But the next game will tell," he said.

Eagles	Singapore
Lambert	Chin
Shanagher	Ishak
Vizard	Chye Lai
Smith	Khoon Huat
Purcell	Ibrahim
Wilkinson	Huai Eng
Gaetjen	Mahwood
Referee: Mao Ting-Ta (Taiwan)	

**Fiji 26,
United States 0**

Stopping Fiji, four-time winner of the Hong Kong Sevens, was a tall order. Ultra quick

Senivalati Lau-lau, Fiji's national hurdles champion, was the fastest man in the tournament. Five players were part of the "Fijian Express" that overwhelmed the All Blacks 26-0 in the 1984 Hong Kong final. Also, the fact that the Fijian squad had been playing sevens together for the last 7 months, didn't necessarily make them ripe for the picking.

Nevertheless, the Hong Kong **Sunday Standard** came out with a statement that a close match between Fiji and America was anticipated. Heady words.

The plan against Fiji was to run at them, tackle aggressively and disrupt their timing.

Lambert and Fowler, the fastest big men in the tournament, and the only large tandem on any one team, were ideally suited for the physical approach. The other 5 Eagles also had to play with reckless abandon to win.

It would also be helpful if Fiji had an off-day.

Steve Gray went with his vets as Finkel relieved Gaetjen and

wide, and Fiji led 14-0 at the half.

Second Half

Following the kickoff, Fiji won a scrum awarded at mid-field. Wagaliti raced to the blind side, kicked down field, and Purcell barely beat the Fijian to the ball which went out at the 2. Fiji got the line out, Talawadua, the second fastest man in the tournament, sold a dummy and broke Shanagher's tackle to score. The kick was wide (18-0).

Once again Smith's kick was not 10 yards and Fiji won a scrum at mid-field. Nawalu cut to the blind-side and was stopped by Purcell.

Talawadua dug out the loose ball and fired it to Lau-lau who sailed in between the posts. Talawadua's kick was wide (22-0). Smith hit a high kickoff down to the Fiji try line. Good pursuit by the Eagles forced a scrum at the 25. The ball went out to Wilkinson, to Fowler, to Lambert to Shanagher who kicked in-goal too deep. Fiji got a drop out and Talawadua's kick sailed to the Eagle 25. Smith covered and passed to Purcell. Talawadua, however, was on him, got possession and broke free. There was an overlap and Ravouvou skipped in for the last try, 26-0.

The Eagles were left wondering how they could ever contain such a machine. It was all first-phase scoring. It wasn't rugby, it was the Grand Prix.

Each team in Pool H found an appropriate level. Fiji would be in the Cup, the U.S. in the Plate, and Singapore in the Bowl. There was no question that this was where everyone belonged.

That evening, thanks to the generosity of American Lines, the Eagles rode a Chinese Junk from Aberdeen to an island restaurant. Their thoughts were not on Chinese food, but on winning the Plate. All the elements for victory were in place — everyone was healthy.

Eagles	Fiji
Fowler	Nawalu
Lambert	Manaseitava
Shanagher	Naruma
Finkel	Wagaliti
Smith	Laulau
Purcell	Talawadua
Wilkinson	Ravouvou

Referee: Derek Bevan (Wales)



Brian Vizard scoring in a 14-4 win over Japan.

(Photo-C. Lambert)



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United States 14, Japan 4

Japan's opening kickoff went deep into U.S. territory. Gaetjen got caught without support and Chida picked up and ran 12 yards for a score. Hirao's kick was wide (4-0).

Smith's drop kick was taken by Japan at their 22 but they knocked on. At the set scrum the Japanese scrumhalf was drawn off side. Smith tapped the penalty, and pitched to Wilkinson who spun to Mike Purcell. Purcell scored under the posts and Smith's kick gave the Eagles a 6-4 lead.

Japan kicked deep to Purcell who lobbed back to Smith. Smith cleared and the ball bounced into touch at midfield.

Vizard deflected the Japanese throw-in, Fowler grabbed it and was tackled by his opposite. Gaetjen snagged the loose ball but lost it.

Yoshino kicked over Wilkinson's head, but Charlie got possession and fed Smith. Smith found Fowler uncovered outside him and John ran into the corner to score.

The kick was no good, but at the half the Eagles had a 10-4 advantage.

Vizard scored the Eagles final try to give them a 14-4 win over Japan.

Mao Ming-ta, the Taiwanese referee, thought both teams lacked technique, but the Eagles' size was an advantage.

Eagles	Japan
Fowler	Konishi
Shanagher	Onuki
Smith	Chida
Purcell	Koshiyama
Wilkinson	Yoshino
Gaetjen	Hirao
Vizard	Taione



Gary Lambert slips away from Ro Hindson and two other Canadians for a try in the Plate Final (Photo-C. Lambert)

United States 18, South Korea 12

Purcell and Vizard were held out of the Korea match.

Purcell learned he'd been selected to join the World XV Tour to South Africa later in the month. He heads there from Scotland, after the Cougars play at the Melrose 7s, and was on cloud nine.

Vizard had shown true international talent. His exuberance, however, was to be saved, should the Eagles get by Korea and meet Canada in the Plate final.

Finkel's aggressive tackling was needed against Korea, who

were as skillful, but more physical than Japan. The much-talked about team depth was bearing fruit.

South Korea can't be taken lightly as they won the Plate in 1982 and 1983.

On the way to this year's Plate semi-final, the Koreans beat Sri Lanka 30-6, lost to Tonga 18-6, and handled a strong Hong Kong team 14-8.

First Half

Fowler got under Smith's kick, tipped it, and deflected it into touch.

Lambert batted the Korean throw-in back to Wilkinson. Smith picked up a low pass and crossed midfield where Oh Dong-Gil made a nice tackle. Gaetjen got possession and fed Finkel who scored. Smith's kick sailed through and the Eagles led 6-0.

Wilkinson fielded the Korean kick and fed Fowler who broke all the way for a try under the posts. The Eagles were up 12-0 and it was looking easy.

Korea drove deep into the Eagle end of the field. The Eagles won a scrum on their own six and Smith spun the ball in-goal to Gaetjen. Running wide, Gaetjen backpassed it to Wilkinson who couldn't escape the pressure. He was tackled and Kim Hyeon scored in the corner. The kick was no good and the half ended Eagles 12, Korea 4.

Second Half

The South Korean kick went deep to Tom Smith. Smith's pass to Finkel was intercepted by Keun-Youn who went in to score. Smith tackled him in-goal which saved a sure conversion (12-8).

Smith's drop kick went from Hyeon to Jae-Myung who placed a kick behind Smith at the

22. Jae-Myung won the race to the ball and scored in good position. An easy kick went wide and the game was even at 12-12.

Fowler got under the ensuing kickoff and tapped to Lambert who knocked on. The Eagles won the scrum and a Smith kick went out on Korea's 22.

Korea won the lineout, worked back up field. Gaetjen fielded a kick and cleared for touch at the 40. Ball from the lineout went from Lambert to Wilkinson to Finkel who was tackled on the Korea 15.

From the ensuing lineout Smith set up a blind side scissors with Gaetjen who touched down in good position. The kick was good and the match ended, Eagles 18-Korea 12.

Eagles	South Korea
Fowler	Young-Chan
Lambert	Keun-Youn
Shanagher	Hyeon
Finkel	Yeon-Ki
Smith	Dong-Gil
Wilkinson	Dong-In
Gaetjen	Jae-Myung

United States 24, Canada 18

To reach the final Canada beat Papua New Guinea 14-6 and then went down to Scotland's powerful Co-Optimists 14-8.

In Sunday's Plate quarter final they beat Taipei 28-8 and then knocked off Bahrain 18-10 in the semi-final.

Final

The momentum certainly seemed to be going Canada's way in the final because just 54 seconds into the match Gord McKinnon took a pass from Wyatt to touch down. The kick was wide and Canada led 4-0. The U.S. kick found touch deep in Canadian territory. Canada was called for a lineout infringement and from the penalty Smith passed to Wilkinson who fed Lambert for the try. The kick was good and the Eagles had the lead 6 to 4.

The Canadian kick-off went from Lambert to Shanagher to Vizard. A penalty was called at the Canadian 22. Shanagher dummied then flipped to Wilkinson who cut through two defenders to score. Smith's kick was good and the Eagles had a 12 to 4 lead. Canada won possession

from a scrum. Thomson passed to Palmer and the Canadian sprint champ turned the corner on Gaetjen and burst with blinding speed for 60 yards and a try. The kick was no good (12-8).

The Eagles came back on a well executed scissors between Smith and Lambert. Shanagher linked up and went along the sideline for an apparent try. The touch judge, however, ruled he was out at the 4 and the half ended with the U.S. on top 12-8.

Second Half

Smith kicked off, Vizard and Lambert got under it and the ball came back to Wilkinson. Charlie flipped a pass behind his back to Lambert, and the big man dashed to the posts to score 21 seconds into the half. Smith's kick was good, and the Eagles had a 10 point lead, 18-8.

Wyatt's kickoff was squibbed straight up the middle like an on-sides kick in football. Gaetjen handled it like a short stop, and before Wyatt knew it, Gaetjen was by him on a 50 yard romp to the end zone. Smith's kick was good and the Eagles led 24-8.

From the ensuing kickoff, action was centered in the U.S. end. From a 5 yard scrum, the ball came out to Palmer, who fed Hindson for a try.

The kick was no good and the Eagles' lead was reduced to 24-12.

Smith kicked off, and Lambert nabbed it on the fly. Palmer, however, who was one of the competition's fastest players, got possession and went 50 yards to score. The kick was short. The Eagles' lead was now only 24-18.

Smith kicked off and Gaetjen made a tackle, but the Eagles were penalized.

Lambert got possession off Canada's kick and booted the which went out at the Canadian 5.

The referee called full time, and the Eagles were celebrating.

To quote **The South China Morning Post**: "The Eagles beat Canada in the most exciting final of the day — a match that marked the coming of age of North American Sevens — It was the first time a North American side had taken a title here, and it isn't likely to be the last."

Eagles	Canada
Lambert	Thomson
Shanagher	Stuart
Smith	McKinnon
Purcell	Wyatt
Wilkinson	Hindson
Gaetjen	Palmer
Vizard	Vaeson

Referee: Kerry Fitzgerald (Australia)

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Ian Nixon, 1st American to referee at Hong Kong. (Photo-D. Fowler)

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