

# United States Wins Moscow 7s

by Eric Contey

## Moscow, USSR September 19 & 23, 1988

Paced by speedsters Barry Williams and Kevin Higgins, the U.S. Eagles won the first Moscow Sevens Tournament by beating a fast Soviet II side, 16-14, in the championship game. The sevens competition was sandwiched between the 15-a-side tests during the Eagles' 10-day visit to Moscow.

### Prelims

In their first match USSR II beat USSR I, 16-0, on tries by Kuperman and Danilov (2), while Berzin kicked 2 conversions. They reached the final by registering an 18-10 win over Romania on tries by Kuperman, Berzin and Sennin. Berzin hit all three conversions.

The U.S. notched preliminary wins over Romania (18-16) and USSR I (22-10).

### Game I

## United States 18, Romania 16

Fili Stadium,  
September 19, 1988

The Eagles demonstrated their 7s expertise with a thrilling 18-16 win over Romania. The U.S., with 6 Hong Kong Eagles, wasted little time getting on the board. Kevin Higgins took a pass from Chris O'Brien and out-sprinted 2 Romanians 90 yards down the right touchline for a centered try. O'Brien toed the conversion for a 6-0 Eagle lead.

After having a score called back on a forward pass, the Romanians struck back. Off an indirect penalty, they spun the ball wide for the winger to score in the corner, but the conversion was missed and the U.S. still led, 6-4.

Each team then gave away a score on a careless pass. First the Eagles' Chris O'Brien snagged a



The U.S. Eagles, winners of the 1988 Moscow 7s. (Front, L-R) - Saunders, O'Brien, Higgins, B. Williams, Hein. (Back) - Paoli (manager), Vizard, Lambert. (Photo - Hagerty)

Romanian pass on the run and fed Mark Williams, who converted his own try (12-4). Then Dumitras, the big Romanian forward, seagulled a U.S. pass to score under the posts. With Varzaru adding the conversion, the Eagle lead was narrowed to 2 points (12-10) at the half.

### 2nd Half

Despite the Eagles' 7s prowess, it was Romania who dominated the opening minutes of the second period, as Tofan took a pass to score from the loose. Neaga converted to put Roma-

nia up for the first time (16-12). As time was running out, Kevin Higgins again displayed astonishing speed. Taking a pass from Saunders he blew by two defenders on his way to an 80-yard try.

Higgins touched down in the corner and O'Brien calmly booted the sideline conversion for the game's final score and an 18-16 U.S. win.

### U.S.

1. Vizard
2. Higgins
3. Lambert
4. Saunders
5. O'Brien
6. Williams, M.
7. Williams, B.

### Game II

## United States 22, USSR I 10

Fili Stadium  
September 19, 1988

The Soviet first team, competent in 15s, had been pounded by their Juniors in the opening 7s match. So the U.S. made drastic lineup changes, which included three players with little or no 7s experience.

In the first half, it appeared that the move would cost the Eagles the match.

Molchanov scored in the first minute of loose play, and though the conversion was missed, the 4-0 Soviet lead looked ominous, as the Eagles were not together. Three minutes later, Andriev scored due to sloppy U.S. defense and Korolikhin's conversion put the Eagles in a 10-0 hole.

Higgins must have had his Wheaties that morning (or the Russian equivalent), as he put

the Eagles back in the game with yet another length-of-the-field dash, this time off a nice Gary Hein pass. O'Brien's conversion made it 10-6, Soviets, at the half.

### 2nd Half

The Eagles got it together in the second spell. A quickly spun penalty got Hein free for a 55-yard gallop to tie the score at 10-10.

Then the Eagles caught the Russians flat-footed with a bit of American razzle-dazzle. Gary Lambert took the Russian kickoff and passed to Brian Vizard along the right touchline. As the Soviets converged on him, "Viz" threw a long football pass to Barry Williams, who juked two white-shirted Soviets in his trademark style, then passed out to O'Brien at speed on the left touchline. The flyhalf had no problem touching down after a 30-yard run and his conversion made it 16-10, U.S.

Moments later the secret weapon worked again on an almost identical play — Lambo to Viz, football pass to O'Brien, out to Hein for a 50-yard try to ice the game. O'Brien's conversion brought the final tally to 22-10.

The Russians tried hard to come back, but good U.S. tackling, especially by Vizard who was nothing short of magnificent on the day, kept the Soviets from doing any damage.

### U.S.

1. Lambert
2. Johnson
3. Vizard
4. Skidmore
5. O'Brien
6. Higgins\*
7. Hein

\* replaced by B. Williams

### Final:

## United States 16, USSR II 14

Fili Stadium  
September 23, 1988

The Eagles won the Moscow 7s by beating the Soviet Jrs., 16-14, in the championship game.

The Americans started the match with a great kickoff play. Flyhalf Chris O'Brien put the kick just high and deep enough for Brian Vizard to catch it in full flight. Vizard fed his partner in 7s crime, Gary Lambert and the ball went from Lambert to Mike Saunders, to Gary Hein, and finally to Barry Williams on the outside. The Russians had developed respect for the elusive Williams, and he justified it by outpacing his counterpart and touching down in the corner. O'Brien missed the conversion (4-0).

The Eagles then worked their patented long pass play; "Lambo" fielding the kickoff, to Vizard for the football pass crossfield to Williams. The Eagle wing was tackled but laid the ball back perfectly for Vizard to pick up. The lanky OMBAC #8 gave to Hein, who had it out to the supporting Saunders for the score. O'Brien had no trouble with the conversion and the Eagles looked away at 10-0.

The speedy Russian Juniors came right back on the relaxed Eagles, however, and Berzin, their threat on the wing, scored in the corner but missed the conversion (10-4).

### 2nd Half

The U.S. continued with their less-than-intense approach and paid for it immediately. Lambert tapped back nicely on the kickoff but no one was there to collect. A crowd of Russians descended on the loose ball with Sharkov emerging to score. Berzin followed with a nice angled conversion to deadlock the match at 10-10.

The Eagles then woke up and came back with a nice try. Lambert crashed the Russian forwards and flicked back to Saunders. The U.S. captain made a beautiful reverse pass which went to O'Brien and then Hein. The ball was reversed back to the wide side to Barry Williams, who was taken down just short of the line. Williams released and then scooped up the ball in a blink to score under the posts. O'Brien nailed the conversion, 16-10 U.S.

Again the Juniors came back, spinning off a scrum to the ever-present Berzin, who made it to the corner. But the speedy Russian failed to convert the sharply-angled kick and the Eagles held on to win (16-14) the 1988 Moscow 7s.

### U.S.

- Lambert
- Higgins
- Vizard
- Saunders
- O'Brien
- Williams, B.
- Hein

### USSR Jrs.

- 1 Medeksha
- 2 Sennin
- 3 Berzin
- 4 Sharkov
- 5 Motolies
- 6 Kuperman
- 7 Danilov

### 3rd Place

In a tightly-contested match for 3rd place, USSR I beat Romania 18-12.

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