

Eagles Reach Final in Lisbon 7s

by Paul Sheehy
with Kurt Oeler

Lisbon, Portugal
June 5-6, 1993

Wrapping up 1993's busy international 7s season on a high note, the US Eagles captured second place at the Lisbon International 7s Tournament. Only their 36-14 title-game loss to Scotland's Saltires stopped the Americans short of their first-ever international 7s championship.

Captained by Hartford's Al Dekin, the nine-man Eagle squad posted a 7-1 record. The Eagles' team speed translated into a balanced offensive attack and five players scored four or more tries. The Eagles' stingy defense allowed just 58 points through six qualifying games, prompting one Saltires player to praise the Americans' ball skills and tackling as the best in the tournament.

Format

With Saltires, the Irish Wolfhounds, and England's Artisans as pretournament favorites, the Lisbon 7s divided its field of sixteen into four four-team pools. The top two teams from each pool then advanced into two divisions of four sides each for more round robin play to determine the semifinalists.

POOL PLAY:

U.S. 21,

Club do Rugby 5

Following a dismal pretournament scrimmage with Zimbabwe, the Eagles blooded six new caps in Saturday's pool action. Only Dekin, Mark Miller of the Maryland Exiles and George Conahey of Belmont Shore were international veterans, but the Americans' inexperience didn't matter in their first two games.

Opening the tournament at wing, Conahey produced 16 points against the Portuguese club 7s champs to set the U.S. off on the right foot.

U.S. Scoring: Conahey 2T, 3C; O'Connor T

- 1 M. Miller
- 2 H. McDonald
- 3 J. Flamish
- 4 G. Tillotson
- 5 A. Dekin (c)
- 6 M. O'Connor
- 7 G. Conahey

U.S. 28,

Cambridge University 0

By substituting Eagle 15s full-back Paul Sheehy for Harry McDonald at hobker and wing Thaddeus Hill for injured Greg Tillotson (with Conahey moving to scrumhalf), coach Steve Gray fielded his best offensive combination in the second match. He may have expected their four-try performance, but Gray had to be even more pleased with the Eagles' defensive work.

U.S. Scoring: Conahey T, 4C; Flamish T; Hill T; O'Connor T

- 1 M. Miller
- 2 P. Sheehy
- 3 J. Flamish
- 4 G. Conahey
- 5 A. Dekin (c)
- 6 M. O'Connor
- 7 T. Hill

U.S. 28, Artisans 26

Using the same lineup as in the Cambridge game, the U.S. extended its shutout skin through the first half of their battle with the English invitational side Artisans, while running in four tries, two by Thaddeus Hill of Dallas. Defensive breakdowns in the second half nearly cost



The U.S. Eagles, silver medalists at the Lisbon 7s: (FRONT, L-R) Paul Sheehy, Thad Hill, George Conahey, Greg Teliczan. (BACK) Coach Steve Gray, Harry MacDonald, Marty O'Connor, John Flamish, Al Dekin, Mark Miller, Manager Keith Seaber

the Eagles the game, however, and in the end only Conahey's perfect kicking—he was 20 of 22 for the weekend-separated the two sides.

U.S. Scoring: Conahey T, 4C; Hill 2T; Sheehy T

- 1 M. Miller
- 2 P. Sheehy
- 3 J. Flamish
- 4 G. Conahey
- 5 A. Dekin (c)
- 6 M. O'Connor
- 7 T. Hill

Finishing Saturday as unexpected winners of pool 4, the Eagles enjoyed a dinner in town hosted by squad manager Keith Seaber and then spent a quiet evening at the Novotel Hotel. With the prospect of semifinal and final contests to follow three more round-robin games on Sunday, the squad needed its rest.

WINNERS

ROUND ROBIN:

U.S. 26,

Portugal 7

The Eagles' first game in the winners round robin matched their sweeper defense against Portugal's man-to-man formation. The U.S. strategy worked well, allowing just one score, but the Portuguese couldn't withstand the Americans' balanced attacking pressure as four different players tallied. Dekin's chip kick and recovery for a try underscored the utility of having an extra line of defense.

U.S. Scoring: Conahey 3C; Dekin T; Flamish T; Hill T; Sheehy T

- 1 M. Miller
- 2 P. Sheehy
- 3 J. Flamish
- 4 G. Conahey
- 5 A. Dekin (c)
- 6 M. O'Connor
- 7 T. Hill

U.S. 14,

Spain 10

In a pivotal game, the Eagles squeezed past highly regarded Spain, the surprising Plate division runners-up in April's World Cup. As he did throughout the tournament, prop Mark Miller outdueled the opposition forwards to win vital kickoff ball. Leading try-scorer Thaddeus Hill and John Flamish (Philly-Whitemarsh) each found the endzone, but Conahey's conversions again proved the difference for the Eagles.

U.S. Scoring: Conahey 2C; Flamish

T; Hill T

- 1 M. Miller
- 2 P. Sheehy
- 3 J. Flamish
- 4 G. Conahey
- 5 A. Dekin (c)
- 6 M. O'Connor
- 7 T. Hill

U.S. 19,

Wolfhounds 10

Having sewn up a semifinal berth with their win over Spain, the Eagles finally shuffled the lineup that had won four straight games. The unyielding Americans, nonetheless, rolled past a star-studded side led by England 7s international Chris Sheehy. Washington's Sheehy tallied twice, while prop Flamish pushed his scoring streak to three games.

U.S. Scoring: Flamish T; McDonald

- 2C; Sheehy 2T
- 1 M. Miller
- 2 H. McDonald
- 3 J. Flamish
- 4 P. Sheehy
- 5 A. Dekin (c)
- 6 M. O'Connor
- 7 T. Hill

SEMIFINAL:

U.S. 22,

Artisans 14

Restoring high-point man Conahey to the lineup, the U.S. prevailed again in their semifinal rematch with the Artisans led by former British Lion Andy Robinson. The Eagles jumped to a 19-7 lead, but clinched the match only after Dekin and Sheehy held up an Artisan player in the end zone and Conahey kicked a rare penalty goal.

Brimming with excitement, the Americans thus advanced to the final.

U.S. Scoring: Conahey 2C, 1PG; Hill T; O'Connor T; Sheehy T

- 1 M. Miller
- 2 P. Sheehy
- 3 J. Flamish
- 4 G. Conahey
- 5 A. Dekin (c)
- 6 M. O'Connor
- 7 T. Hill

FINAL:

Saltires 36,

U.S. 14

Going into the final, five US starters had seven games under their belt and two more had played six. More-

down by Hill.
U.S. Scoring: Conahey 2C; Hill T; O'Connor T
1 M. Miller
2 P. Sheehy
3 J. Flamish
4 G. Conahey
5 A. Dekin (c)
6 M. O'Connor
7 T. Hill

Postscript

The Eagles returned home from Lisbon elated by their runnerup finish. Many squad members credited coach Gray for the unexpectedly strong showing. "He downplayed the intensity of the tournament and let us play," observed Sheehy. "He didn't overcoach, but told us that our instincts have to take over."

Captain Dekin also praised his club for its determination. "We played every minute of every game," he emphasized, "especially on defense when [teams] were coming back."

The Lisbon squad's success follows on the Sicily 7s Trophy Division championship won by Mike Saunders's equally fresh-faced charges in late May. Both performances stand in contrast to the different results produced by veteran Eagles 7s players in Hong Kong and at the World Cup earlier this year, though admittedly the latter are tougher competitions.

Interestingly, while the Sicily squad drew all but two of its players from the Pacific Coast, the Lisbon outfit relied heavily on Rugby-East. Only Dekin and Conahey joined both parties.

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For information contact:

Phil Ulibarri
4551 Almond Drive (H)702-826-8167
Reno, NV 89502 (W)702-328-2448