

# Argentina Wins Punta del Este 7s

by Emil Signes

Punta del Este, Uruguay  
January 7-8, 1995

Ever since the major rugby nations came to terms with sevens by sending national teams to Hong Kong (Fiji in 1976, Australia in 1977, New Zealand in 1983, Wales in 1990, Scotland and France in 1991, Ireland in 1993, and — finally — England in 1995), other promoters have recognized the possibilities of staging major international sevens tournament either to complement or (after 1997), replace Hong Kong. So far, more have failed than succeeded.

The Sydney Sevens lasted from 1986 to 1989 before it went under, and the "new" Sydney Sevens is of the Rugby League variety. The Sicily Sevens, inaugurated in 1990, may still be in existence, but I'm sure it hasn't yet put more than 500 people into the stands. Fiji continues to sponsor an international sevens, but it is not clear what the future holds for it. Canberra, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Bangkok, Benidorm, Lisbon, Dubai - the list goes on - all have or are trying to sponsor major international sevens tournaments. Some prosper more than others; many simply lead a year to year existence.

Even the 1993 Rugby World Cup, despite the exceptional quality of play, failed to match Hong Kong as an event.

The country that may be succeeding best at the moment is Uruguay.

## 24 Teams

The Punta del Este Sevens began as a club sevens event in 1989, sponsored by the British Schools Old Boys' Club, one of a handful of first division clubs in Uruguay.

Rapidly, however, the tournament added invitational, provincial and national sides. This year, 16 different countries were represented by 24 different teams, 12 of them official national selections. Many of those that weren't full national sides were still quite impressive: the Australian Barbarians, for example, were



Atlantis players enjoy some of the many attractions offered at Uruguay's Punta del Este 7s.

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loaded with present and future Wallabies, including my choice for tournament MVP, 18-year old Ben Tune.

The U.S. Eagles participated in this year's event, as did the U.S. invitational side Atlantis.

At this point, Punta del Este has a legitimate claim to be the number one international sevens tournament in both the Western and Southern hemispheres.

## Location

Location is everything. Well, a lot, anyway.

Punta del Este is located at the southeast corner of Uruguay, where the River Plate meets the Atlantic Ocean. Everywhere is close to the beach, on both ocean and river sides. One of the world's most glamorous summer resorts, Punta del Este swarms with upper-class Argentinians who find it more exclusive than anything their country has to offer. Not so exclusive as to keep out US high culture, however: there was a big MTV shoot taking place on the beach during our visit.

One of the interesting things about Punta is that its hours argue for its establishment as a vampire haven. People seem to sleep during the day, as nothing starts until well after dark, after midnight even: the bars and clubs are nearly empty before about 2 AM. The tournament itself started at 4 PM on Saturday, later on Sunday, and the championship final finished after 1 AM.

## Sponsors

The Punta del Este Sevens has developed a large core of sponsors including the one type of business that international sevens tournaments need — an airline: Aerolineas Argentinas. Signs, stickers, posters, etc., for other sponsors — Reebok, Gatorade, Parisiennes, Zillertal (a Uruguayan beer), Quilmes (an Argentinian beer), FM 94.7, etc., were everywhere.

## Tournament

The tournament took place on January 7-8, one day after "reyes," a national holiday: the 12th day of Christmas, when in commemoration of the Magi, the children receive their gifts.

The tournament itself follows the now ubiquitous Hong Kong format: 24 teams arranged in eight groups of three. On the first day, the eight groups are ranked one to three based on play within the groups. The top teams go into the gold division, the second place teams into the silver, and the third place teams into the bronze.

For the first and only time, the tournament was moved to a small stadium while the main stadium is being rebuilt into "the stadium of the year 2000." Although its 7,000 capacity was too small, it did have its

positive aspects. The place was packed to the rafters on Sunday night, creating a great atmosphere.

The eight groups were seeded as follows:

- A**
- 1 Fiji Cavaliers
  - 2 Uruguay
  - 3 Mar del Plata (Argentinean province)

- B**
- 1 South Africa
  - 2 FIRA \*
  - 3 Old Boys Club
  - \* Selection from France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Holland, Morocco, Tunisia

- C**
- 1 Argentina
  - 2 USA
  - 3 Montevideo

- D**
- 1 France
  - 2 Spain
  - 3 Atlantis (US-based invitational)

- E**
- 1 Australian Barbarians
  - 2 Chile
  - 3 Buenos Aires

- F**
- 1 Tonga
  - 2 Penguins (England-based invitational)
  - 3 Rosario (Argentinean province)

- G**
- 1 W. Samoa
  - 2 Invitation VII \*\*
  - 3 Paraguay
  - \*\* players from New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, and Uruguay invited by host club.

- H**
- 1 New Zealand
  - 2 Canada
  - 3 Rio de la Plata (Argentina/Uruguay regional)

## SATURDAY

The seedings proved pretty accurate: only in group A, where Mar del Plata finished ahead of Uruguay, and group F, where the seedings were totally reversed, did the first day deviate from form.

**Group A.** One of the most incredible games of the day was Uruguay vs. Fiji. With the final bell already sounded, Fiji had the ball under pressure in their own in-goal, trailing Uruguay (?) 24-21. Being Fiji, they moved it 100 meters to score the winning try. It was nevertheless con-

sidered a great day in Uruguayan rugby history (had the game ended 30 seconds earlier, it might have been remembered forever as the great day).

**Group B.** South Africa had its hands full with a FIRA side that played with the flair usually accompanied by the word "French."

**Groups C, D and E.** Argentina, France and Australia easily won both of their games.

**Group F.** Next to the Fiji-Uruguay match, the Tonga-Rosario game had to be the most exciting of the day, with the score see-sawing back and forth until Rosario finally put the game away with the last try, 24-19.

**Groups G and H.** Western Samoa shocked the "loaded" Invitational VII (Junior Paramore, Richard Turner, Lindsay Raki, Lisandro Arbiza were among them) 41-7, and cruised by Paraguay, while New Zealand shut out both Canada and Rio de la Plata.

## Parade of Teams

Just as at Hong Kong, all teams paraded around the ground. The ceremony took place during the second series of round robin matches, immediately following the Atlantis/France match, and featured parachutists as well as many voluptuous and scantily-clad Brazilian rumba dancers entertaining the crowd and players.

## SUNDAY

As the games increased in intensity, the crowd increased in enthusiasm, and by the finals the place was rockin'.

## BRONZE: TONGA

In the bronze quarterfinals Uruguay knocked off the Old Boys. Atlantis defeated Montevideo (AKA Uruguay "B"), and Tonga and Rio de la Plata won their games in the lower half of the bracket.

## Atlantis 14, Uruguay 7

In the bronze semifinal, Atlantis surprised Uruguay and thousands of cheering spectators, with two Thaddeus Hill tries, to win 14-7. Hill's first try was on a switch off Charlie Wilkinson for about a 30-meter try, and, after Uruguay had tied the game, a long break finished off by Hill got Atlantis ahead for good. With the ball in his hands at the final bell rang, Hill had only 10 seconds to kick to touch, but instead ran into trouble and was penalized. Atlantis shut down the ensuing Uruguay attack to win the game.

## Tonga 31, Atlantis 10

In the Bronze final (Tonga had crushed Rio de la Plata in the semifinal), Atlantis went ahead of Tonga 5-0 after a great individual effort by Brian Gallagher. Atlantis' inability to win good scrum ball, however, gave Tonga many possessions it shouldn't have had, and like all Tongan sides do, they scored on several of them. Atlantis only had one other score — a try from a penalty when John Flamish slashed through a gap — in a 31-10 loss.

## SILVER: FIRA

FIRA, coached by long-time Côte Basque and Spain coach Christian Murillo, barely squeaked by Mar del Plata 17-14, before mismanaging the French-like sizzle with a 24-0 thrashing of Spain. In the Silver final, the FIRA players rolled on the ground hugging each other with 200 others hard-fought 24-19 victory over the Invitational VII.

Incidentally, Gabriel Alonso, the person most responsible for getting Atlantis invited to Punta del Este played, in my opinion, the

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been several of the entire Invitational VII. I thought he might have been a valuable addition to the Uruguay squad.

Chile, victim to the Invitational VII, nevertheless showed a good command of scrums in defeating the Penguins in the Silver quarterfinals.

### GOLD: ARGENTINA

The gold division began with a 49-0 dusting of South Africa by Fiji. (The results of this game sowed seeds of doubt in the American players' minds about Charlie Wilkinson's knowledge of the game: he had set the line and was giving Fiji 9 points.)

The next game turned out to be far more crucial than anyone knew at the time. With France leading 10-7 and no time left, Argentina scored the winning try on a pass everyone but the referee realized was forward.

Australia put an end to Rosario's Cinderella quest, 33-7, with a hat trick by their 18-year old wing Ben Tune, and Western Samoa, led by Brian Lima, defeated New Zealand 12-5.

### Semifinals: Argentina 19, Fiji 17

Fiji stormed ahead to a 12-0 lead over Argentina, and this game looked to be a repeat of their match with South Africa. But they got cocky, got tackled on their goal line, coughed up the ball for a Puma try and Argentina was in the game. The Pumas again scored on the ensuing kickoff with one of the great tries of the tournament, and took command of the game. Argentina ended up scoring 5 consecutive tries in a 29-17 win.

### Australia 26, W. Samoa 10

With Fiji and New Zealand, last year's finalists, gone, Western Samoa became the team to beat. Australia, led by Tune — who has never played a game of senior rugby — did just that. With an incredible combination of moves and speed, Tune put Australia ahead early in the match and also finished the scoring in a 26-10 win.

### Gold Final: Argentina 36, Australia 19

Australia got on the board first with a Michael Flanagan try, but Argentina responded quickly with a try by Fernando del Castillo. The teams then traded tries again (Ben Tune and Rolando Martin). With only a minute left in the half, Australian captain and scrumhalf Mark Catchpole scooted around the scrum for about a 40-meter try. Argentina raced up to the half way line and grubbed a kickoff away from the forwards, which eventually resulted in a try for Puma captain Pedro Baraldi. Argentina went into the half leading 21-19 and it turned out to be all they needed.

Baraldi added a second half try on an interception, del Castillo added a penalty, and tournament MVP Agustin Pichot closed out the scoring with a try, as Argentina won the match 36-19.

Luis Alberto Lacalle Herrera, President of the Republic of Uruguay, added even more class to the event by presenting the award to the visitors.

<b>Argentina</b>	<b>Australia</b>
Baraldi (2T)	Flanagan (T)
Martin (T)	Connors
Viel	3 Kelaher (2C) **
Pichot (T)	4 Catchpole (T)
del Castillo (T)	5 McMullen
Bouzo (3C, PK)	6 Fielke *
Albanese (C)	7 Tune (T)
* replaced by Langford	
** replaced by Lodge	

## U.S. EAGLES

Two American teams participated in the tournament: an official US selection coached by former Eagle Jim Wilkinson, in his first stint at high-level coaching, and Atlantis, an invitational side that I put together and coached.

### The US team comprised:

Chris Andres	NOVA
Jon Campbell	Atlanta Renegades
Chris Carney	Atlanta Blues
Chris Motes	Montauk (NY)
Marty O'Connor (C)	South Jersey
Joe Santos	OMBAC
Ed Schram	OMBAC
Mike Siano	Life College

Rich Schurfeld was also selected, but had to drop out at the last instant when his business became victim to the California floods.

This left Jimmy with eight players, and he reluctantly dusted off his boots, just in case.

### US 21, Montevideo 7

Montevideo scored first after it won its own kickoff and supported well. The US, who started shakily, finally got on the board with a length of the field try started by Marty O'Connor and finished by Chris Andres. The halftime score was 7-7, but the US was in the driver's seat and never looked back.

The US dominated the second half and easily won the game. Captain O'Connor and Jon Campbell scored tries. Chris Motes converted all three tries.

### Argentina 33, US 7

This was Argentina's tournament, and they played a brilliant game against the US. The Eagles scored their only try when Chris Carney committed several defenders and passed the ball to Chris Motes, who got it to Campbell and then to Andres for a good try. With injuries to Mike Siano and Ed Schram, Jim Wilkinson got in his first bit of national duty in several years, finishing the last three minutes of the match.

### Spain 14, US 12

The US took an early 5-0 lead in the silver quarterfinal on a try by Chris Motes. Spain, however, went ahead 7-5 after applying heavy pressure on the US following their kickoff.

Early in the second half, with the score still 7-5, a Campbell drop kick attempt missed its mark. With the US pressuring Spain in their own goal, a Spaniard got through a gap, was tackled by Ed Schram, but managed to pass to support, who took it the final 80 yards, 14-5. It was to be the winning try in a game totally dominated by the US.

The US then spent what seemed like an eternity camped out at the Spanish goal line, and was awarded penalty after penalty. Some poor US decisions combined with a furious Spanish defense, however, delayed the inevitable US try until very late in the match. With the score 14-12, the US had a brief chance to come back but Spain held out.

Jim Wilkinson was delighted with his first opportunity to coach at this level, and enjoyed working with the team. Nevertheless, the triple duties of coach, manager and player put some pressure on him. "I didn't feel," he commented, "that I was able to take the pressure off the players as much as I would have liked to."

### ATLANTIS

During the Benidorm Sevens last June, Atlantis shared a long bus ride from Madrid to Benidorm with the British School Old Boys. Uruguay's representative at Benidorm. A week-long friendship resulted which ultimately culminated

in an invitation to Atlantis to participate in the Punta del Este 7s.

### Team

Al Dekin	Washington
Brian Dettling	Bethlehem
Drew Faultley	New York
John Flamish	Philly-Whitemarsh
Brian Gallagher	Maryland Exiles
Dan Kennedy	Old Blue (NY)
Thaddeus Hill	Fort Worth
Dave Priestas (co-C)	Bethlehem
Charlie Wilkinson (co-C)	NOVA

Atlantis was fortunate to have two management personnel, Bill Gardner and Terry Ziegenfuss, on board.

### "Turista"

Some sort of virus hit the team, as virtually all 12 tour party members became ill, some more than others. Al Dekin and Terry Ziegenfuss were so ill that they never left the hotel on Saturday, and Al did not participate in either round robin game.

### Spain 24, Atlantis 14

Nevertheless, with a 14-7 halftime lead over Spain, and Atlantis in control, it seemed virtually certain that a Silver quarterfinal matchup between Atlantis and the US was in store. Spain, nevertheless, had other things in mind, and came back with two tries, one of them after an ill-advised Atlantis line-out throw over the top.

Trailing 19-14 with no time left, Atlantis stole the ball from Spain, created an overlap and for a few brief seconds seemed destined to win. Spain, however, intercepted a pass and finished the scoring itself.

### France 46, Atlantis 7

Atlantis' defeat at the hands of France was total and embarrassing, and the players were not in the mood to go directly from that game into the tournament parade. For some, watching the Brazilian rumba dancers seemed to momentarily ease the agony.

### Atlantis 17, Montevideo 7

Atlantis defeated Montevideo without much trouble, on two tries by Brian Gallagher and one by Al Dekin.

Thaddeus Hill was the Atlantis defensive star, and was cited in the official video of the event as "one of the best tacklers of the tournament."

### Camarderie

Both American teams practiced together, sat together and cheered for each other. It was probably best for all concerned that they never got to play each other.

### US Scoring

Player	Tries	Conv	Points
Motes	1	4	13
Andres	2		10
Campbell	1	1	7
O'Connor	1		5
Schram	1		5
Total	6	5	40

### Atlantis Scoring

Player	Tries	Conv	Points
Gallagher	4		20
Dekin	1	3	11
Kennedy	2		10
Hill	2		10
Flamish	1		5
Dettling		2	4
Priestas		1	2
Total	10	6	62

### Party

The tournament party took place in an incredible natural grove in Punta Ballena, just on the outskirts of Punta del Este. To get to the grove, one had to cross a walkway that runs over the water as it washes up over the beach and against the rocks. It's simply beyond me to describe it other than to say it was amazing. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves as more and more players arrived, but as it was

approaching 4 AM, this author went back to the hotel to sleep.

### Charlie and Charvet

One of the unique opportunities of events like these at international tournaments is the social interaction between players. Witness this conversation between Atlantis' Charlie Wilkinson (40+ sevens games for the US) and Denis Charvet of France.

Wilkinson: "You're pretty good. Where have you been? I've never seen you around."

Charvet: "I've been capped 30 times for France."

Wilkinson: "Yeah, well [but let's talk about the important things], you've never been to Hong Kong."

What Charlie meant, of course, was that with all the mediocre sevens teams that France has sent to international tournaments in the past, how could they not have sent someone as talented as Charvet?

Charvet, however, will attend Hong Kong this year with virtually the same squad that participated in Uruguay. It should be far more competitive than any sevens team France has fielded in the past.

### Statistics

People that know me realize my fascination for statistics. The Old Boys have someone on their club with a similar fascination, as shown by the following list that appeared in their program:

216 players / 24 coaches / 24 managers / 11 referees / 8 members of the Control Desk / 62 people in charge of delegations / 353 hotel reservations / 24 minibuses / 45 matches / 630 minutes of play / 10.5 hours of rugby / 556 meals per day / 20,000 leaflets / 5,000 posters / 15,000 stickers / 20 sales promoters / 3,000 guests to the function / 32 reporters / 600 T-shirts / 200 jerseys / 1,000 radio commercials / 320 accreditations / 4 parachutists / 20 musicians / 15 rumba dancers / 22 ball boys / 10 secretaries / 7 TV cameras / 5 painters / 6000

square metres of grass / 30 security agents / 240 air tickets from 5 continents.

The other statistics of interest are the scoring totals. This year's tournament featured 277 tries: 158 on Saturday and 119 on Sunday. This averages out to more than 6 tries a game, and is comparable to the 275 tries scored in Hong Kong this year. Not so long ago, sevens tournaments were averaging only about 5 tries per game. It ain't getting any easier for the defense!

### The Future

Not to be outdone by Hong Kong, Punta del Este is rebuilding its own stadium, to be completed in June of this year. The *Nuevo Campo Maldonado* — "the stadium of the year 2000," as it's being billed — will seat 25,000, including a roofed box with a seating capacity of 400.

There will be a VIP lounge for 500 people, 28 broadcast cabins, a 4,400 square foot press room and a 2,000 square foot press conference hall, plus ample changing areas and illumination.

Most likely the trend will be to continue to increase the presence of national teams, and the days of invitational sides may soon be numbered. From a personal point of view, I hope that time can be delayed for a few years.

### Thanks

Thanks from all participants are due to the tireless organizers of the tournament, especially to Pedro Bordaberry, tournament director, to Norman Fox, club president, and to José Obes and Martín Stefani and other members of the Committee.

Special thanks from Atlantis to Gabriel "Bull" Alonso and the entire Old Boys squad in Benidorm, for setting up, providing, so Jorge Freccero for taking care of us at the airport, and to Drs. Carlos Garbino and Gonzalo Rodriguez Quagliata for taking care of us during two entire days of physical misery.

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