

Atlantis Wins Inaugural Hong Kong Women's 7s

by Emil Signes

Squeezed in between the Carlsberg 10s and Cathay Pacific-HongkongBank Invitation Sevens, the Hong Kong Women's International Sevens made its debut. Open to club and select-sides from around the world, it wasn't really a big deal: the competition wasn't great and the weather nearly canceled it, but it may be the beginning of something big.

One of the participants, and easily the best, was Atlantis, featuring seven members of the current U.S. women's squad. Atlantis crushed its opposition, scoring 29 tries to none in the three games it took to win the championship.

One reason Atlantis made the journey to this tiny, remote, unfunded tournament was to help the Hong Kong women's community in its quest to develop an international women's sevens tournament for national teams only. We felt that our skills were sufficient to convince any enthusiast that the women's game could be played as attractively as the men's. Fortunately for us, one of the event's spectators was famed BBC commentator and former Scottish international Ian Robertson, who interviewed captain Tracy Henderson, and later raved to IRB president Vernon Pugh, among others, about the quality of Atlantis' play.

Genesis: Sallie Ahlert
It took Oklahoma's Sallie Ahlert to get the ball rolling for women's sevens. Following a national sevens tournament in 1992 she single-handedly developed a program for the Western RFU. But her ambitions have always been greater, and as the newly designated coordinator for U.S. women's sevens, she got together with me to explore international venues. With the Hong Kong women eyeing a true international sevens tournament in 1997, their 1996 event seemed a good beginning. Since this year's event was not for national sides, we decided to enter Atlantis.

The Squad & Training
I was surprised to find out how good a team I was able to select, given the fact that not one penny of sponsorship money was initially available. It's a measure of how dedicated elite American women players are that they find ways to make trips like these.

The squad consisted of seven current members of the U.S. women's squad. Five players had represented the U.S. in the 1991 and/or 1994 World Cups. In fact, only one of the 10 players — Washington's Nancy Fitz — has never played at the U.S. level, although she has the ability to.

I was the coach and our co-managers were Suzanne Cobarruvias of Houston and Janet Marshall of Fayetteville, Arkansas. Every single member — coach and management alike — had E-mail addresses, and communication was remarkably efficient.

We met in Los Angeles on Friday evening, March 22, and did double sessions both Saturday and Sunday, culminating in a scrimmage against UCLA. Since these were truly elite players, we thought it would be worthwhile finding out their speed and aerobic capacity, and I conducted both a 40-yard dash and a beep test during the weekend. The squad list and fitness results are given in an accom-



The Atlantis Women: (FRONT, L-R) Marshall (manager), Henderson, Orsini, Jervey, Cyganik, Bergmann, Cobarruvias (manager). (BACK) Signes (coach), Irby, Fitz, Mohl, Ahlert, Westerman.

panying table.

We also trained the first two days in Hong Kong. These training sessions had the side benefit of providing us access to other teams and events in town: the Carlsberg 10s and Hong Kong 7s. We watched the All Blacks scrimmage both the U.S. and Wales, had a chance to mingle with famous players, and took a picture of the first all-world co-ed sevens pack: props Nancy Fitz and M.J. Mohl, and hooker Eric Rush.

In addition, U.S. HOG master Drew Fautley provided valuable scrummaging advice in between his team's successful march to the Hong Kong 10s Plate Championship.

GoDown/Muncys
Besides the formal training sessions, we reinstated the tradition of American players showing up at the GoDown bar, swapping T-shirts with the proprietors, and enjoying the relaxed atmosphere. Our team also appreciated and accepted the invitation to the pre-sevens function at the home of U.S. Eagle supporters John and Mirja Muncy.

Tournament
When we arrived at the Aberdeen Stadium on Friday morning following a torrential downpour, half the field was under several inches of water, and the first word we got was that the tournament was canceled. More determined heads prevailed, however, and the tournament was moved from the stadium to a soccer pitch 50 yards away.

Atlantis 69,
Asia Pacific 0
The first match was between Atlantis and Asia-Pacific, a mixed Hong Kong side. Flyhalf and turnover MVP Jos Bergmann led the scoring with 4 tries and 7 conversions in an 11-try Atlantis romp. Kim Cyganik, MVP of the 1993 Collegiate National Championship, added three tries.

Atlantis
1 Fitz 1T
2 Jervey 1T
3 Mohl
4 Cyganik 3T
5 Bergmann 4T, 7C
6 Orsini 1T
7 Irby 1T

Atlantis 62,
Timaru (NZ) 0
The Americans were far too strong for the side from New

Name	T	C	Pts
Bergmann	6	15	60
Westerman	4	3	26
Jervey	4	0	20
Cyganik	4	0	20
Fitz	3	0	15
Ahlert	2	0	10
Irby	2	0	10
Mohl	2	0	10
Orsini	2	0	10
Total	29	18	181

Zealand's South Island, and eight of the nine Atlantis players who got in the game scored.

1 Mohl * 1T
2 Henderson
3 Westerman 2T
4 Jervey T
5 Bergmann T, 6C
6 Orsini ** T
7 Ahlert T

* replaced by Fitz, 2 tries
** replaced by Irby, try
Final: Atlantis 50,
Combined VII 0

Atlantis was scheduled to meet a Japanese team in the final, but by that time it had become clear there was no one capable of giving us a serious game. The organizers then assembled a "Combined VII," consisting of the best Japanese players plus some of the top players from the other teams. It had no effect, and Atlantis took another easy victory, and captain Tracy Henderson took the hardware.

1 Mohl 1T
2 Henderson
3 Westerman 2T, 3C
4 Cyganik T
5 Bergman * T, 2C
6 Ahlert T

7 Irby
* replaced by Jervey, 2 tries
The Cathay Pacific
HongkongBank 7s

Talk to any of the Atlantis players and I'm pretty sure they'll agree that "The Sevens" was better than they had imagined. Everyone enjoyed the games and the spirit of the event, and most team members joined in the latest Hong Kong 7s fad: dancing in your seat during the half-time break of each match. There are also spots on the large replay screen available for messages, and I was deeply touched by one that said simply, "We love you Emil

ran into both BBC announcer Ian Robertson and IRB Chairman Vernon Pugh. Robertson spoke with glowing praise about the Atlantis women's skills, and suggested that the 1997 7s World Cup would be well served if it were preceded by a Women's Sevens World Cup, in which the final match could be played as an exhibition during the men's event.

The Sevens Banquet
A few of our players were fortunate enough to attend the post-banquet festivities and hobnob with some of the top players in the world. There was a great camaraderie between Atlantis and New Zealand, and we were pleased to see the Atlantis pin worn on the lapel of the world champions.

Future
The skills of our top American women players cry out for participation in more international sevens tournaments. Furthermore, the ease with which men's and women's teams can mix at sevens tournaments presents an opportunity for world rugby fans to appreciate the skills of our top women athletes. Nevertheless, the tournaments at which this is possible are extremely limited. With the dedication and persistence of determined people like Sallie Ahlert, however, and the support of establishment people like Ian Robertson, who knows where the future may lead?

Signes — Atlantis Women."
Post Match Functions: Ian Robertson and Vernon Pugh
Sallie Ahlert and I, covering "The Sevens" for *Rugby and In Support*, respectively, attended the post-tournament media dinner and



Nancy Fitz, All Black captain Eric Rush and M.J. Mohl form an All World co-ed front row.



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