

New Zealand Edges Fiji 19-17 For Hong Kong Crown

by Emil Signes

Hong Kong
March 29-31, 1996

With Fiji trailing 19-17 and about to kick off for a chance to win the 1996 Hong Kong 7s, superstar Waisale Serevi inexplicably stood at the halfway line for a full 20 seconds as the clock on the scoreboard moved from 9:40 to 10:00. The clock reached 10 minutes, the referee blew his whistle and the game was over.

The entire crowd stared with disbelief as Serevi stood there waiting... for what? Serevi later claimed that Fiji was changing a player and he assumed they were getting added time for it, but it was a gamble he clearly shouldn't have taken.

Meanwhile New Zealand's new superstar, 20-year old Christian Cullen, who was named the MVP at this January's Punta del Este 7s (Uruguay), shattered tournament scoring marks with 18 tries and 136 points in six games. It was no surprise that he was named Hong Kong's "Best and Fairest."

New Zealand 19,
Fiji 17

The end of the game wasn't the match's only controversial moment, as the All Blacks' first score was a penalty try awarded after Serevi was judged to have tripped Cullen, 7-0. A converted try by Setareki Naivaluwaga evened things out and the score remained tied until late in the half, when the play of the game occurred, with Cullen seemingly trapped near his own dead ball line.

Both New Zealand captain Eric Rush and coach Gordon Tietjens seemed upset that Cullen didn't play it more safely. "I just wanted him to kick the thing out of the ground," said Rush, "and when he started running I couldn't believe it."

But Cullen put a tremendous



Ed Schram considers his options during the Eagles' lone victory over Papua New Guinea, 24-21.

move on two Fijian defenders and started an incredible 110-meter try that was finished by Fijian transplant Waisake Masirewa, giving the All Blacks a 14-7 lead at the break.

Masirewa's inclusion marks the third consecutive year that New Zealand has used a player who was on Fiji's roster in Hong Kong the previous year (Masirewa 1996, Joel Vidiri 1995 & 1996 and Luke Erenavula 1994).

Second Half

Early in the second half Serevi

gambled when he kicked a penalty goal to narrow the margin to 14-10. Masirewa's second try put New Zealand ahead 19-10, and Jope Tuikabe's last minute score set the stage for the final tragedy.

New Zealand

Lomu	1
Rush	2
Masirewa (2T)	3
Tauivi	4
Woods	5
Vidiri	6
Cullen (2C)	7

New Zealand one penalty try

Hong Kong Format: No Longer Played at Hong Kong

In 1997 the second 7s World Cup will take place in Hong Kong and several of this year's experiments may be repeated in that event. For one thing, although the number of teams stayed constant at 24, the brackets were changed from eight pools of three to six pools of four.

The new format meant that two second place teams would emerge as wild cards to the Cup round, and also that two third place teams would be relegated to the Bowl.

Friday night saw blowout matches between the #1 and #4 seeds and then some exciting matches between the #2 and #3 seeds. Attractive matches between such traditional rivals as Scotland and England and the U.S. and Canada were part of Friday night's attractions.

In addition to these changes, there was a dramatic law change: the team that scored kicked off. This law was lambasted by sevens powers such as New Zealand both before and after the tournament, but I, for one, liked it.

Saturday's play included matches between #2 and 4 and 1 and 3, followed by 3 vs. 4 and 1 vs. 2 matches, where teams' fates were finally sealed. The seeding committee must know their stuff. In the 36 round robin matches, there was only one upset: Canada's stunning 19-12 defeat of South Africa.

Bowl Results

The two third place teams relegated to the Bowl were Namibia and Japan, and these two teams justified their pool standings by making it to the Bowl final, where Japan crushed a disappointing Namibia 55-21. The Japan coach, Fijian Paulo Nawalu, said he wanted Japan to be on the other end of a rout, similar to their 77-0 loss to New Zealand, and they nearly were.

Nawalu is hoping to get Japan into the 1997 7s World Cup and would like to launch a specialized sevens program in Japan. "We don't have enough sevens tournaments and all of our players are drawn from 15-a-side rugby," he said. "I'm certain there are good

sevens players around Japan but there's no chance to notice them.

Plate Results

Most observers figured the Plate championship would go to either France or South Africa, and they were, in fact, the class teams of the bracket. Unfortunately, they had to meet in the Plate semifinal, where France won an exciting 29-26 match.

Trailing 19-0 on two France Corrihons scores plus a penalty try, South Africa came storming back with two tries by Stephen Brink and one each by Andre Venter and Breyton Paulse, with France Alexandre Bouyssi scoring as well. This left the regulation time score 26-26, and it took a penalty kick by Hugo Mola in overtime to win the game for France.

In the other Plate semifinal, Hong Kong, seemingly in disarray since their playmaker Moape Ravuvu refused to return from Fiji (for reasons unknown to the public), did a great job getting to the final. Their winning try over Argentina in the semifinal was scored by former Colgate All American Rob Santos, who broke through from a kickoff after being fed by fellow American Stu Krohn.

The final wasn't much of a game, however. France, led by playmaker Hugo Mola and wing Fran Corrihons, took apart Hong Kong 45-12.

Cup Prelims

With Ireland in the Cup by virtue of a 2-0-1 record, Wales became the only 2-1 team to reach the Cup round. And deservedly so, as a Neil Jenkins penalty attempt from the left touchline that bounced the upright denied them a robinet against Australia (Fiji score: Australia 21, Wales 19).

In the Cup quarterfinals, Ireland was, as expected, brushed off New Zealand 49-0, and England Australia won relatively comfortable games against Western Samoa (27-7) and Canada (19-5). In the fourth quarterfinal, however, Wales gave Fiji a scare, taking a 12-0 lead and looking the better team... the inevitable happened and ended up with a 28-12 victory in the end.

New Zealand duplicated its World Cup semifinal dominance over England in this event with 19 victory, just about the only one in which Jonah Lomu showed off the qualities that made him a worldwide phenomenon in the past year. On one play, I sent a 40 yard football pass a the field, setting up a Cullen try; another, a "special" play in which he lined up on the wing from lineout, Lomu's sheer power out two people before feeding Cullen for yet another of his four tries in this game.

Fiji was simply clinical in its 7 semifinal win over Australia in this set up the exciting final with All Blacks.

Surprise Team: Canada With its stunning 19-12 up South Africa, Canada became only team to defy the sevens advance. By giving Australia good game in the quarter Canada added even more to its ability.

The South Africa pool was a barn burner the whole way with Canada leading 7-5 at the on the virtue of a David Lotry (converted by John Graf) Africa stormed back into the early in the second half with

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Pause's second try. Canada came back to tie the game with two minutes left on a Winston Stanley try, and win it at the last moment when John Graf scored and converted his own try.

Five Nations: Strong Teams
It was good to see the Five Nations (England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, France) send strong sides to Hong Kong, with all teams including players in contention for next year's 7s World Cup competition. England had six of its 1993 World Championship team in attendance, Wales was represented by several star players, including Ieuan Evans, and both did relatively well. One can only hope that this bodes well not only for the upcoming 7s World Cup, but also for international sevens in general.

But the ultimate winner was the Hong Kong 7s itself: it's still the greatest!

U.S. Eagles: 1-3

The record of the 1996 U.S. Eagles will go down as a disappointing 1-3 as they exited, like last year, in the Plate quarterfinals against Argentina. Nevertheless, had it not been for two specific incidents, the outcome might have been far different. People who are quick to criticize often fail to take

the time to reflect that, had one little thing gone differently, outcomes might be totally reversed.

With a squad composed of some of the best rugby athletes in the country, the Eagles came to town a week earlier than usual, helped by long-time Eagle supporters John and Mirja Muncy, and looked good in scrimmages with Hong Kong, whom they beat handily, and New Zealand, against whom they looked truly competitive. There was a lot of Hong Kong experience on the squad and Eagle coach Mike Saunders had high expectations for this team.

Canada 20, U.S. 19

Tragedy Number One

In their first game against Canada, a real nail-biter, the Eagles led 19-17 with just 30 seconds left to go. With Canada attacking near the Eagles' 22, Andre Bachelet stole a Canadian scrum and the Eagles went on the attack. A late whistle, however, gave Canada a penalty between the posts. John Graf calmly slotted the kick and Canadian arms went up in exultation as the hooter sounded.

It was not clear from the sidelines what the referee had called,

and had there been no call, the U.S. would have gone into their match against South Africa with a chance to make the Cup round. Instead, with tough Papua N.G. next, they had to focus on getting themselves in a position to do well in the Plate.

South Africa 38, U.S. 5

The U.S., perhaps still reeling from the Canada game, were never in this game, and South Africa cruised to a 38-5 win. The only Eagle score came on a late Thad Hill burst up the middle. Perhaps even more damaging to the Eagle cause were injuries to two key players, Jim Burgett and Mark Williams.

USA	South Africa
Tardits	1 O'Cuinneagan (T)
Burgett *	2 Brand (T)
Lyle	3 Ventner
Bachelet	4 Brettenbach
Anitoni	5 Paulse (2T,1C)
Williams **	6 Brink (1T,3C)
Hill (1T)	7 van Zyl (1T)

1996 Eagles

Name	Position	Ht.	Wt.	DoB	Club
Vaea Anitoni	FH	5'8	170	9/20/70	Tongan Yankees
Andre Bachelet (c)	SH	5'7	181	3/11/70	Old Blues
Jim Burgett	H	6'1	200	5/12/65	Old Puget Sound
Thad Hill	W	5'7	170	12/30/67	Fort Worth
Dan Lyle	P	6'5	250	9/28/70	OMBAC
Rob Randall	P	6'4	239	4/8/67	Old Blues
Ed Schram	H	5'10	203	9/28/68	OMBAC
Tomasi Takau	W.C	5'11	210	10/15/69	Belmont Shore
Richard Tardits	P	6'2	243	7/30/65	Life College
Mark Williams	C	5'11	190	6/26/61	Aspen

Mike Saunders	Coach	Boise, Idaho
Ed Schram	Manager	Santa Barbara, California
Ed Ayub	Physiotherapist	San Diego, California

* replaced by Takau
** replaced by Schram

U.S. 24, Papua N.G. 21

Because of the revised format, it was not guaranteed that all the 1-2 teams would get into the Plate: there would be two third place teams, in fact, that would wind up in the Bowl round. The Eagles needed to defeat Papua New Guinea and score four tries in the process to wind up in the Plate.

They did that, the final score appearing close only because of two very late Papua New Guinea tries. Andre Bachelet started the scoring for the Eagles, and Vaea Anitoni finished it with a hat trick and two conversions.

USA	Papua NG
Tardits	1 Koi **
Schram	2 *Joseph (1T)
Lyle	3 Emil
Bachelet (1T)	4 Toiip (1T)
Anitoni (3T,2C)	5 Guiah ***
Takau	6 Asimda (1T,1C)
Hill	7 Vitolo (2C)

* replaced by Randall
** replaced by Leklek
*** replaced by Esersa

Argentina 52, U.S. 12

The Eagles were now in the Plate - the slate wiped clean, as it were, with a chance to fight for the championship. It would not be easy, however. The quality of the Hong Kong 7s has risen so much in the last few years that among those

1996 Hong Kong 7s Results

Preliminary Round

Pool A

- New Zealand 75, Sri Lanka 0
- New Zealand 77, Japan 0
- New Zealand 28, France 14
- France 56, Sri Lanka 5
- France 19, Japan 7
- Japan 35, Sri Lanka 0

Pool B

- England 52, Singapore 0
- England 31, Scotland 12
- England 24, Argentina 7
- Argentina 57, Singapore 7
- Argentina 29, Scotland 19
- Scotland 56, Singapore 0

Pool C

- Ireland 43, Malaysia 5
- Ireland 21, Namibia 15
- Ireland 14, W. Samoa 14
- Samoa 54, Malaysia 5
- W. Samoa 49, Namibia 0
- Namibia 24, Malaysia 21

Pool D

- Australia 47, Taiwan 0
- Australia 33, Korea 7
- Australia 21, Wales 19
- Wales 52, Taiwan 0
- Wales 29, Korea 19
- Korea 35, Taiwan 5

Pool E

- Canada 21, Papua N. Guinea 5
- Canada 20, U.S. 19
- Canada 19, South Africa 12
- South Africa 45, PN Guinea 12
- South Africa 38, U.S. 5
- U.S. 24, Papua N. Guinea 21

Pool F

- Fiji 68, Thailand 12
- Fiji 49, Hong Kong 0
- Fiji 40, Tonga 0
- Tonga 56, Thailand 5
- Tonga 17, Hong Kong 12
- Hong Kong 54, Thailand 5

Cup Championship

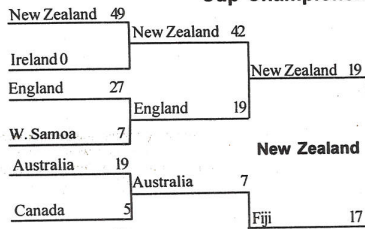
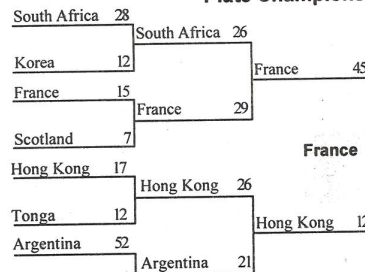
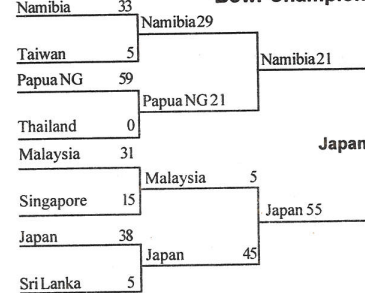


Plate Championship

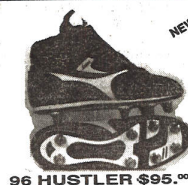


Bowl Championship



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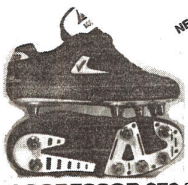
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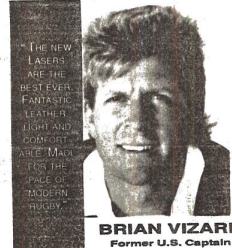
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The 1996 U.S. Eagle Team: (FRONT, L-R) Hill, Williams, Takau, Bachelet, Anitoni. (BACK) Saunders (coach), Schram, Tardits, Lyle, Randell, Burgett, Ayub (trainer), Schram (manager).

seeking the Plate title were France and South Africa, semifinalists at last year's Rugby World Cup; not to mention Argentina, the Eagles' quarterfinal opponent.

The Eagles' task was compounded by the fact that they went into the Plate round without the services of two projected starters: center Mark Williams and forward Jim Burgett, both injured.

Tragedy Number Two

Everyone knows the Latin propensity to "take a dive" to get calls in soccer, and rugby is no different. Thus it seemed to be an over-reaction when referee Paddy O'Brien (New Zealand) called Thad Hill over to warn him after an Argentine ducked into Thad's sideline tackle and immediately gave an Oscar performance on the ground.

Shortly thereafter, Hill came across from his sweeper position

and as he was about to tackle Agustin Pichot, the Argentine scrumhalf kicked ahead, and Hill's tackle came in slightly late. O'Brien awarded a penalty try, and oblivious to the fact that Hill was being punched as he lay on the ground, ejected him from the game with the first half not yet ended.

It was a tragedy for Thad, an intense player who had been having an excellent tournament and was universally praised in the Hong Kong papers for his sterling defensive work.

Prior to the penalty try, the score was 12-7 Argentina, and the Eagles were in with a real shot of winning.

Beating Argentina was going to be tough even with seven players, but with six? Briefly, the Eagles played with offensive brilliance, working like demons off the ball

and keeping it alive and moving long enough for Tomasi Takau to score his second try and get the game close at 19-12.

The dam, however, broke soon thereafter and the final score was a huge 52-12 victory for Argentina.

While Eagle supporters sat in stunned silence, I could only reflect that, had two referees seen one incident each a little differently (a not unlikely scenario), the final outcome and the perception of the Eagles' performance might have been very different.

USA		Argentina	
Tardits	1 Albanese (1T,3C)	Baraldi (1T)	
Schram	2 Baraldi (1T)	Camerlinckx	
Lyle	3 Camerlinckx	Pichot (1T)	
Bachelet (1C)	4 Pichot (1T)	Forrester (2T,3C)	
Anitoni	5 Forrester (2T,3C)	Garcia Orsetti (1T)	
Takau (2T)	6 Garcia Orsetti (1T)	Simone (1T)	
Hill*	7 Simone (1T)		

* sent off at 7:00
Argentina: one penalty try

Hong Kong's Top 50 Scorers

Player	Team	Tries	Kicks	Pts.
Christian Cullen	New Zealand	18	23	136
Waisale Serevi	Fiji	3	30	76
Stephen Brink	South Africa	7	13	61
Gerhard Mans	Namibia	7	11	57
Olivier Campan	France	3	19	53
Manasa Bari	Fiji	10	0	50
Hiroki Ozeki	Japan	10	0	50
Breyton Paules	South Africa	8	4	48
Fa'avaivai Tanoa'i	W. Samoa	2	17	44
Nick Beal	England	4	11	42
Neil Jenkins	Wales	4	11	42
Lemeki Koroi	Fiji	8	0	40
Isi Tu'ivai	Hong Kong	4	10	40
Waisea Batibasaga	Australia	7	2	39
Franck Corrihons	France	7	0	35
Sua Taumalolo	Tonga	3	10	35
David Kelaher	Australia	1	14	33
Wataru Murata	Japan	3	9	33
John Asimda	PNG	6	1	32
Vaea Anitoni	U.S.	5	3	31
Kevin Vitolo	PNG	1	13	31
Hugo Mola	France	5	2	30
Toa Samania	W. Samoa	6	0	30
Vaughan Going	Hong Kong	5	2	29
Yoji Nagamoto	Japan	2	9	28
Niall Woods	Ireland	4	4	28
Waisake Masirewa	New Zealand	5	1	27
Samuela Taupeaefe	Japan	5	1	27
Pedro Baraldi	Argentina	4	3	26
Duncan Forrester	Argentina	4	3	26
Alexander Bouyssie	France	5	0	25
Semisi Faka'osifolau	Tonga	5	0	25
Shah Iran Sahar	Malaysia	5	0	25
Jon Sleightholme	England	5	0	25
Fernando del Castillo	Argentina	4	2	24
Octavio Bartolucci	Argentina	4	1	22
Rodney McIntosh	Hong Kong	4	1	22
Takeomi Ito	Japan	4	0	20
Paul Joseph	PNG	4	0	20
Jaco Kotze	Namibia	4	0	20
Jonah Lomu	New Zealand	4	0	20
Eric Rush	New Zealand	4	0	20
Chris Sheasby	England	4	0	20
Joe Toilip	PNG	4	0	20
Gregor Townsend	Scotland	2	5	20
Jope Tuikabe	Fiji	4	0	20
Joeli Vidiri	New Zealand	4	0	20
Diego Albanese	Argentina	1	7	19
Damian Hopley	England	3	2	19
John Graf	Canada	1	6	18

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