

US Women Reach Final Of Hong Kong 7s

By Emil Signes

Hong Kong, Friday, March 26, 1999

Playing in Hong Kong Stadium during the Sevens in front of 20,000 people should be every ambitious rugby player's dream. Very few, however, achieve this dream; particularly women. That's because, until now, there has never been a significant women's game played at this venue.

1999, the 24th playing of the Hong Kong Sevens, was the first year that an important women's match was contested in the hallowed ground of Hong Kong Stadium.

In 1997, the first Hong Kong women's international tournament was contested a week before the men's tourney, and therefore got little recognition. The 1998 tournament was cancelled because of the upcoming Women's Rugby World Cup.

In 1998, however, while covering the Sevens for *Rugby Magazine*, I met with the women's tournament chairpersons, Dick Airth and Karen Robertson. During this meeting I urged that there be some sort of nexus between the two tournaments, with at least the women's final being played during the men's sevens. Airth, during his speech at the banquet, was to mention that conversation as a key factor in the decision to do just that.

The primary goal of the US women was to get to that final. And, with a convincing victory over a strong England team in the semifinals, we did it!

Final: New Zealand 29, USA 0

In the final, the US women gave New Zealand everything they could



The US Women: (Kneeling L-R): Cyganik, Friel, K. Caravelli, Cabrera, Rowe. (Standing L-R): A. Caravelli, Rodriguez, Mitchell, Queen, Fitz, Schnapp, Pease, Signes.

handle in the first half, holding them scoreless for the first seven minutes, and trailing only 0-5 at half-time of the 20-minute game. The US, in fact, was within 10 meters of the NZ goal for an extended period, and in the end it was our offense, not our D, that was to let us down.

Lisa Rowe made a great open field tackle of New Zealand's "female Christian Cullen", wing Tammi Wilson. Laura Cabrera unceremoniously dumped Dianne Kahura,

who had scored four tries against us in 1997, with a WWF body slam that had the crowd roaring.

New Zealand scored from the opening kickoff in the second half. Shortly thereafter, despite an excellent tackle from sweeper Inés "Chuck" Rodriguez-Redondo, NZ's first support player got there before ours, and the score was soon 0-17.

The US attack never got anywhere, and ultimately we were un-

able to contain the Kiwi juggernaut in what was to be a 29-0 loss.

USA		New Zealand
Queen*	1	Rush
Rod-Redondo**	2	Holden
Schnapp	3	Robinson
Rowe	4	*Hirovaana
Mitchell***	5	Shortland
Pease	6	Kahura
Cabrera	7	Wilson
Fitz*	R	R* Kiwi
Cyganik**	R	
Friel***	R	

Compliments

Still, the fans raved about the game and our players were recognized and complimented by dozens of fans as they left the stadium at the end of the evening. During the course of the next two days, several coaches, players, committee members and media reps spoke with great admiration about our standard of play. Even commentator David Campese, who two years earlier had said women shouldn't even be playing rugby, spoke positively of the game. At the media banquet he stated that the women had played some of the best 7s of the weekend.

Beating the Kiwis obviously remains a goal — and an important one (it may appear Quixotic, but we'll see) — but getting to the stadium and putting on a great exhibition for the crowd was an incredible step forward for women's rugby.

Semifinals: USA 24, England 5

Our "must win" game against England started out with one of the most brilliant tries of the tournament. Laura Cabrera, who played very well throughout, tackled the England wing, poached the ball and cleared it to space. A few passes later, Anita Pease put in a cross-field grub kick that Laura fielded on the run, took to the 5-meter line, and while being tackled, passed back to Anita for the centered try.

That score set the tone for the game, and was followed by the tries of Lisa Rowe, Rodriguez and another by Pease, resulting in a 24-5 Eagle win.

Trivia note: this may well have been the first international rugby game in which identical twins — Jane and Emma Mitchell — competed against each other.

New Zealand 38, Australia 0

New Zealand crushed Australia 38-0 in its 14-minute semifinal. After Al Caravelli and I watched the tape of the game, we commented on how tough Australia had played the Kiwis. Combining that fact with the score made us realize, once again, just how good the New Zealand women really are.

Preliminaries

The preliminary games — as well as the semifinals — were held at the Hong Kong Football Club, site of the Carlsberg Hong Kong Tens. The big drawback to the women's tournament was that, in trying to shoehorn it all into one day (between the Tens and the Sevens), teams got too few games. Four brackets of three leading to semifinals meant that it was only four games to win.

Our pool was the worst. Fiji dropped out three days before the competition, when expected sponsorship fell through. A 62-0 win over fledgling China was to be our only match before the "all or nothing" contest with England. Both Kim Cyganik and Michele Friel scored hat tricks in the China match.

England breezed through Singapore and the Arabian Gulf, while New Zealand dispatched Russia and Japan with equal ease.

The 4th pool, however, was the toughest, with three good teams: Australia, Samoa and Hong Kong. (The entire Samoan team, interestingly, flew in from their homes in New Zealand.) The only really contested match in pool play was Samoa vs. Australia. Australia, trailing 14-12 with no time left, came back to win — ironically — with an 80-yard try by their Samoan center.

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US Scoring Summary

Name	Tries	Conv	Pts
Pease	4	0	20
Rodriguez-Redondo	2	3	16
Cyganik	3	0	15
Friel	3	0	15
Mitchell	0	4	8
Fitz	1	0	5
Rowe	1	0	5
Cabrera	0	1	2
Total	14	8	86
Opponents	6	2	34

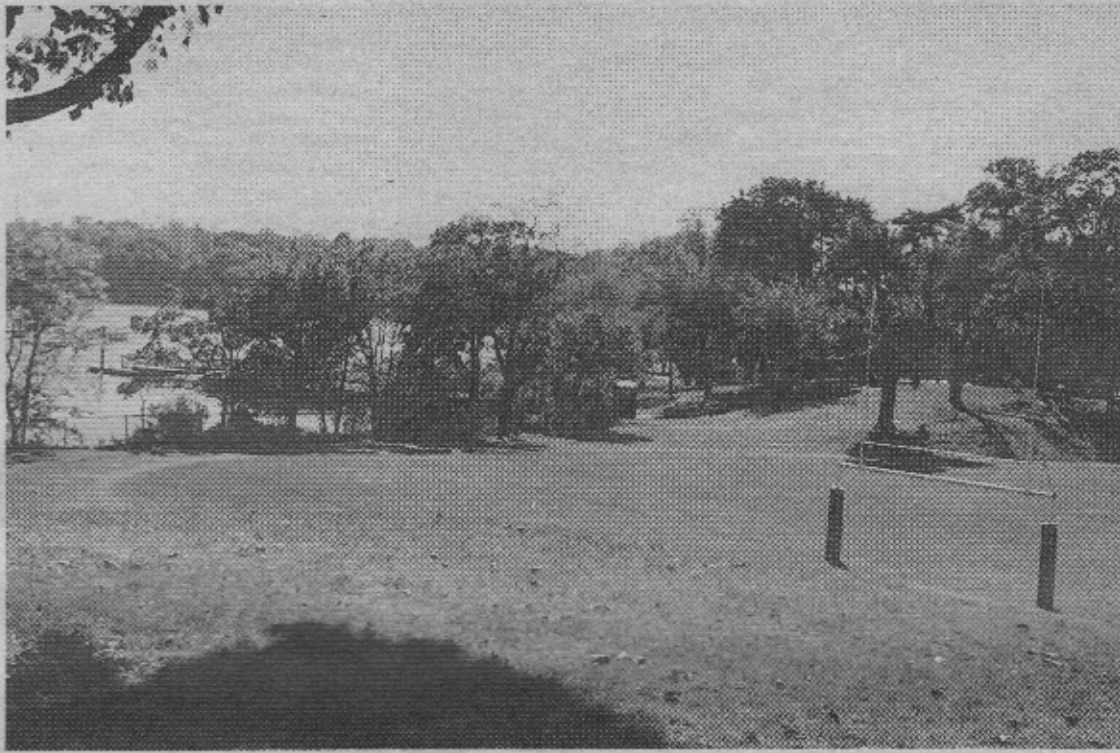
The NYAC's Winged Foot Rugby Club

The New York Athletic Club's Winged Foot Rugby Club celebrated its 25th anniversary last year with notable success on the field and a significant effort to strengthen its program. The club made its first appearance in the Sweet Sixteen round USA Rugby's National Club Championship and Ben Parker, a Kiwi, formerly of Belmont Shore, has come on as coach to upgrade and expand the program.

The New York Athletic Club has a long history of association with the Olympics and Olympic athletes. As rugby is being more seriously considered as an Olympic sport, the club is increasing its commitment. The club's objective is to create a program where Olympic quality amateur athletes can train, play at the highest level of competition, and go on to represent the NYAC and the nation in international competition.

City House

Players train at NYAC's City House and at a lighted training field on Roosevelt Island, a short subway hop from the club. The City House is a 25-story building located at the corner of Central Park South and 7th Avenue. The architecture and facilities at the City House are unparalleled. Athletic facilities include a fully equipped gym and indoor running track; international squash and handball facilities; supervised fitness center; a boxing room; a pool and billiards room; a judo and wrestling room; a fencing room and an aqua



Winged Foot's pitch is located at Travers Island, the club's 35 acre summer headquarters. Members can moor their boats in the club's harbor (left).

center consisting of a 25 yard indoor pool, steam room, sauna, spout room, hydro-therapy center, jacuzzis and a restaurant.

When members are not training, they can usually be found in the second floor Tap Room having a pint of the 10 beers on tap or a light meal in its 19th century atmosphere. A more formal high ceilinged restaurant overlooks Central Park from

the eleventh floor, while a piano bar off the lobby offers an elegant alternative to the Tap Room. Members have access to hotel rooms and meeting rooms for guests and parties.

The Winged Foot Rugby Club is one of the 45 "intra clubs" of the NYAC that encompass a myriad of athletic and social activities. All rugby players receive a privilege pass, which enables them to use the

training facilities in the gym at any time. Exceptional players receive athletic memberships to the NYAC, which has all the privileges of a resident membership. Approximately 50% of players join the NYAC on their own to enjoy the many advantages that the club presents.

Travers Island

Games are played at Travers Island, the 35-acre summer home of the NYAC, which is located on the

north shore of Long Island Sound. The Travers Island pitch is one of the finest in the Northeast. It is owned and maintained by the NYAC and is a 20-30 minute drive from midtown Manhattan. The Olympic, outdoor, salt-water pool is the centerpiece at Travers but the island plays host to a wide variety of activities. Tennis, rowing, yachting, soccer, lacrosse and a children's day camp keep the place busy. The main house has both formal and informal restaurants and bars.

The club plays a Northeast Rugby Union schedule in the fall and appears regularly in the Savannah and Cherry Blossom Tournaments in the spring. Recent fixtures have included six "Super League" teams, as well as a national club schedule.

The "Winged Foot Classics" are the alumni group that turned out 45 players for the 25th anniversary match with Greystones; a Dublin club that has produced a number of Irish internationals. The Classics have a strong sense of camaraderie and adventure. They travel to Ireland and England to play and view international matches. They are scheduled to visit San Francisco for a match with the Olympic Club in the spring. They regularly appear at A team matches and support the competitive side.

The New York Athletic Club has rugby facilities that are second to none in the country. The club is committed to use those facilities to become a regional and national center for rugby.

US Women:

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Plate

Samoa went on to easily win the Plate — really there were only five good teams here — defeating a vastly improved Japan team in the final. The Samoan women were the hit of the tournament, their island dress and island songs at the banquet complementing their play on the field.

US National Team

Manager:

Tracy Moens

Coaches:

Emil Signes

Al Caravelli

Captains:

Nancy Fitz, Washington Furies

Anita Pease, Maryland Stingers

Players:

Laura Cabrera, Ozark Ladies

Kim Cyganik, Maryland Stingers

Michele Friel, Beantown

Jane Mitchell, Berkeley All Blues

Erina Queen, Emerald City

Inés Rodríguez-Redondo, Philly

Lisa Rowe, Maryland Stingers

Diane Schnapp, Berkeley All Blues

Mascot:

Kristina Caravelli

New Orleans Selection Camp

The team was selected at a training camp in New Orleans in mid-January. 35 players attended, as did coaches Drew Fautley and Dr. Greg Schor, who also provided chiropractic care. It was exciting, as were the results.

Bethlehem Training Camp

I have never had the luxury of getting an entire team together prior to an international venue, but every single player on this team was willing to sacrifice a weekend — and more money — to attend a team camp in Bethlehem. With a huge indoor facility provided by Moravian College basketball coach

Mary Beth Spirk, we were able to get a lot accomplished despite outdoor wind chills of 15 below zero.

Raffle, Matt Godek

The Bethlehem camp, as well as the Hong Kong trip, were partly funded by money from our raffle, which grossed more than \$7000. Thanks to Matt Godek's kickback of his \$2,000 prize, we were able to cover more than half of our kit costs.

Boys and Girls Together

For those who have been involved in both men's and women's rugby over the years, the mutual animosity manifested during the 1980s and early 1990s was particularly painful. This year was very different.

Despite their participation in the Hong Kong Sevens, the US women had to buy their own tickets to the men's event. The US men were given one complimentary ticket each and donated seven to our women, lessening our team costs by \$700.

There was good interaction between the two teams throughout the week. The two teams attended a joint function on Tuesday and the men supported us at our game vs. New Zealand on Friday, with Manager Keith Seaber and Coach Bill Russell attending our preliminary matches as well. The women were at all the men's matches, and those women that wanted to enjoyed the rarified air of the men's banquet as well. During the players' parade, Don Younger carried women's mascot Kristina Caravelli, wearing an Uncle Sam hat, on his shoulders. It was a far and welcome cry from many previous men — women rugby interactions.

2000

The 1999 women's final was such a success that the organizers were talking about an expanded format

for next year, possibly a Thursday/Friday event that would allow more preliminary matches to be played. Here's a possible scenario: the quarterfinals in the stadium before Friday's men's games, two semifinals at the end of Friday's competition, and the final at prime time on Saturday (when the attendance should be closer to 30,000).

National Women's Sevens?

Our women players must become missionaries to get more of our elite 15s players involved in sevens, and to encourage the establishment of women's all-star and national club sevens championships. Whatever it takes, getting to play in front of 20,000 people in Hong Kong stadium is a worthy goal.

Thanks

To those that didn't make the trip, thanks to Drew Fautley, Greg Schor and Mary Beth Spirk for all their help preparing the team, and to Matt Godek for his huge contribution. Also, thanks to John "Spike" Walsh (as well as Marcus Maffei) for helping to organize the raffle. Dave Grogan of New Orleans was instrumental in organizing the camp and prepared our program booklet.

Thanks to Pat Weak who proved an integral part of our party, taping all our practices and games. Thanks to Keith McLean and Marcus Maffei, both of whom participated in the Tens, who were very supportive, attending several training sessions (which convinced me that to beat New Zealand, among other things, we need to practice — a lot — against men).

Thanks to Eagle Tracy Moens for her managerial work and to Al Caravelli for his inspirational demeanor and his coaching. Thanks to Bill, Keith and all the US men for their support and encouragement. On the Hong Kong end, thanks

to Dick Airth, Karen Robertson and Rob Perren, as well as our liaison Deano. Thanks to the Hong Kong Sevens organizing committee for allowing the women's final on their pitch, despite many (misplaced) misgivings. Thanks to the Samoans for the scrimmage and their friendship.

And thanks, finally, to the New Zealand women for keeping the bar so high.

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