

US Women's 7s Team Grows Up

By Emil Signes

When the young (median age 23) and new (no returning starters from last year's Hong Kong final) US National 7s team was crushed 41-7 by the Aotearoa (NZ) Maori team at February's Whangarei Sevens, their prospects for the 2002 season looked bleak.

Nevertheless, when the two sides met in the championship final in Hong Kong stadium (both with only three changes in their 10-player rosters), it was a virtually even game. Although the Maori side ended up the winner, it was by a 14-7 score in a game that could easily have gone the other way.

The US team ended up with a decent 8-3-1 record for the season, with two losses to NZ Maori and one to NZ Maori "A". More importantly, the improvement from Whangarei to Hong Kong shows the US youngsters are growing up fast.

Whangarei

With New Zealand holding back its World Cup players, the country's top sevens representative, Aotearoa Maori was no slouch. Half of its players — including the 2001 Hong Kong MVP Tamaku Paul, and the 2001 Whangarei Sevens MVP Kellie Kiwi — had represented NZ in sevens.

The World Cup also affected the availability of US players, although two World Cup squad members — Ellie Karvoski and Kristin Baja — played in Whangarei.

This is the third consecutive year the Whangarei Sevens has featured international women's rugby, and the players were celebrities in this small city 2½ hours north of Auckland. The US players made trips to local schools, where they spent hours signing autographs and playing [rough] touch rugby with dozens of kids 12 and under.

As well as double practices, the week also included a guest appearance at a local radio station and horseback riding in the pouring rain at Waipū, organized by host



The US Women in Hong Kong - Standing: Dave Pelton (referee), Beet McKinnon (physio), Al Caravelli (coach), Pam Kosanke, Tyshawn Henry, Pam Irby (co-captain), Ellie Karvoski, Kerry McCabe (co-captain), Chris Ryan (manager) Emil Signes (coach). **Kneeling:** Melody Peterson, Jen Sinkler, Kristin Baja, Meredith Whalen, Lindsay Davison.

Martin Albrecht. And then there were daily breakfasts at the Caffeine Espresso Café, selected Northland's 2001 Café of the Year.

Thursday featured a visit to the Maori community of Waitangi, birthplace of New Zealand, where European and Maori signed the famous treaty that bears the town's name. Introduced by Jersey Jack Magullian, a former New Jerseyite, we stayed overnight at the Te Tii Marae.

A Marae is the focal point of a Maori community and consists of several buildings and their grounds. We slept in a large room with 13 mattresses spread on the floor.

Part of our welcome included a brilliant haka by two teenage boys. One of these boys, Cory Abraham, is a member of the NZ U-15 team and holds a place in the NZ record books for scoring 349 tries in 19 games in an Under-9 league!!

The players — with Melody Peterson as the ringleader — became Pied Pipers to the young kids, teaching them US dance moves (Melody also put on a show on the Marae basketball court, dunking over one of the locals). After telling the kids she was from L.A., Melody, however, had to respond to the question: "Have you ever taken part in a drive by?" The kids had a strange perception of US lifestyles.

Oh, I almost forgot: the hour and a half trip to Waitangi — 13 of us omnipresent in our 10-passenger van — was punctuated by a stop at the world-famous public toilets of Kawakawa (honest).

Games

The Eagles won all three of its matches against Northland club sides, but had to come from behind with a brilliant try by Pam Irby to defeat United Kawakawa 14-12. The lack of US scoring in these early games highlighted an offensive deficiency that was to haunt us throughout the two tournaments.

The international match series began with an embarrassing 41-7 loss to Aotearoa Maori, followed by another disappointing loss to Aotearoa "A", the Maori second side. When provincial side North Harbour upset Aotearoa, our fate was sealed; at that point there was no way we could make it to the championship game. We did come back to a 0-0 standoff vs. North Harbour, and then salvaged some pride with a 5-0 victory in a rematch vs. Maori "A".

Following the tournament we spent a day on the beach of Tutukaka.

Hong Kong

Clash of Class

In the space of a few weeks we visited two worlds very different from those we were accustomed to. Nevertheless, the people we met in both those worlds were great to us!

Our visit to Waitangi was spent with people whose average annual salary is considerably less than US \$10,000. We brought a bunch of rugby kit with us and presented it to

host players for special accomplishments. The comment was made that Cory Abraham finally got his own pair of boots.

In Hong Kong we were in an environment where a Maori's annual salary would barely pay one month's rent for an ex-pat apartment, and our banquet was held at the Hong Kong Football Club, one of the elite country clubs of this "Special Administrative Region" of China.

Following our first HK practice (a mere 3½ hours), we had a marvelous visit with our liaison Brenda Bulawa. On Monday we took a junk ride to Lamma Island and its great seafood restaurants, while Tuesday and Wednesday were split between double sessions and social events. The games began on Thursday.

Games

China, Japan and Hong Kong were games we were never going to lose, although Hong Kong made us work for our 15-0 win. It took a last-second power try by Tyshawn Henry, however, to knock off an excellent Kazakhstan team (12-10), composed entirely of its World Cup players.

Championship Final

The HK final, for the 4th consecutive year, was held on Friday in the beautiful Hong Kong Stadium. This year, however, it was the first game of the day, resulting in a smaller crowd — and a shortened game.

The final was marked by constant threats from both sides and excellent defense. A spectacular run down and tackle by sweeper Meredith Whalen saved a try inches short of the line. In the 9th minute, a long run down the blindside set up a penalty five meters from the US line and a NZ try by Rachel Wikepa that Kellie Kiwi converted, 7-0.

Another penalty and another defensive error led to a second converted try by another 20-year old, Honey Hireme, 14-0. Finally, from a scrum in front of the New Zealand goal, tight-head prop Ellie Karvoski looped to the far left side of the field to receive a pass from wing Lindsay Davison. Karvoski barreled over for a try and Kristin Baja slotted an incredible touchline conversion to



Kerry McCabe of the US breaks away against Hong Kong at the HK 7s.

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keep the US in the game, 14-7, with nearly two minutes to go.

With plenty of time left, and our 2nd and 3rd reserves about to enter the game, we thought we could make a run at tying the match. However, the men's New Zealand - Singapore game was scheduled to kick off momentarily and referee Carmel Secto heard a voice in her carpiece that said: "We are on live TV and we have not counted on extratime. Don't let them kick off."

End of game. End of our 2002 Hong Kong hopes.
We were, of course,

disappointed and the "What if?" question never goes away. In the end, though, transforming a 41-7 score into 14-7 is something to be proud of.

Part of the credit goes to the players that joined us for Hong Kong — co-captain Kerry McCabe, Lindsay Davison and Jen Sinkler — but the core of players that moved on from New Zealand to Hong Kong really stepped up their games.

Women's Sevens World Cup, 2005!

The United States has been in the forefront of the effort to make

international women's sevens respectable and it looks like we are succeeding. At the banquet, Jamie Scott, the IRB Executive Council Representative, Asia, reaffirmed his statements in the tournament program.

He congratulated the Hong Kong Women and HKRFU for hosting the event and confirmed that the IRB had OK'd the staging, in 2005, of a Women's Rugby World Cup Sevens. This step forward was in line with the Board's stated aim of including both men's and women's rugby as a competition sport in the

Olympic Games.

The timetable is:
2003 - Regional Women's Sevens Competition in Asia, Oceania, Europe, Africa and the Americas.
2004 - Regional Women's RWC Sevens 2005 Qualifying Rounds
2005 - Women's Rugby World Cup Sevens

Joining the Parade

Following the final, the team spent the rest of the weekend at the stadium appreciating the great play and cheering on the US men.

In another step forward, the two Women's finalists were invited to participate in Sunday's Parade of Nations, just prior to the Cup Quarterfinals. It's a spectacular event to see, and even better to be part of. Onwards and upwards!

Wait 'til next year!

US Scoring, New Zealand

Name	T	C	Pts
Baja	3	6	27
Henry	2	0	10
Whalen	2	0	10
Kosanke	1	2	9
Irby	1	0	5
Karvoski	1	0	5
Peterson	1	0	5
Total	11	8	71
Opponents	11	4	63

US Scoring, Hong Kong

Name	T	C	Pts
Karvoski	7	0	35
Baja	3	3	21
Davison	3	0	15
Henry	2	0	10
Whalen	2	0	10
Irby	1	0	5
Kosanke	0	2	4
Total	18	5	100
Opponents	4	2	24

US National Women's Sevens Teams, 2002

Kristin Baja*	NZ & HK	5'8"	160	22	Washington Furies
Shalanda Baker*	NZ	5'5"	143	25	Berkeley All Blues
Lindsay Davison*	HK	5'3"	130	26	Beantown
Tyshawn Henry	NZ & HK	5'6"	170	26	At Large
Pam Irby	NZ & HK	5'5"	135	37	Oregon Sports Union
Ellie Karvoski*	NZ & HK	5'8"	157	26	New York
Pam Kosanke*	NZ & HK	5'6"	152	24	Chicago North Shore
Kerry McCabe	HK	5'8"	145	34	Beantown
Daniela Mogro*	NZ	5'2"	115	22	Washington Furies
Melody Peterson*	NZ & HK	5'9"	168	23	At Large
Jen Sinkler*	IHK	5'6"	150	23	MN Valkyries
Meredith Whalen	NZ & HK	5'3"	135	23	New York
Karima White*	NZ	5'8"	140	22	New Mexico State

* National Sevens Team Rookies

US Men's Sevens

**Beijing 7s:
England Ends
US Run
In Plate Semifinal**

**Beijing, China
March 16-17, 2002**
England downed the United States 21-12 in the Plate semifinal of the Beijing 7s, ending another Eagle run to the top eight of a World Sevens Series tournament.

South Africa handed the US a 33-5 opening-round loss, Beijing's eventual runners-up proving too speedy in counterattack. The Jason Raven-led US side then logged 22-14 and 31-12 pool wins over Wales and China, respectively.

For the second time in three tournaments, the USA then played 7s Series leaders New Zealand. Against the eventual champions, the US scored first but fell behind 19-7 in a tight first half. New Zealand continued on to a 40-7 win, although the score seemed a bit unfair to the Eagles, who had a try called back and missed some other scoring chances.

In the Plate semifinal, tries by Jone Naqica and David Fee paced the Eagles to a 12-7 halftime lead, but a try just after intermission and one right at full-time earned England the match.

"Our performance on Day 2 was our most satisfying in the last 12 months," USA coach John McKittrick said.

"We've made the championship round only three times but in two of the three we played with composure against New Zealand and certainly against England. Now we can think about knocking these teams over on a more consistent basis," McKittrick said.

The USA 7s coach also pointed out positive contributions by newcomers Conrad Hodgson and Marc Vera; Hodgson starting in four of five games; and Vera coming on as

a substitute in four contests. Ryan ReBell and Paul Emerick also earned their debut 7s caps in Beijing.

For the first time this season, the US starters—Ben Trautwein, Alex Magleby, Hodgson, Raven, Koroi, Jovesa Naivalu, and Fee—and indeed the entire squad came through the tournament injury free. The Eagles also marked a milestone in becoming what is believed to be the first American national rugby side to compete in the People's Republic of China.

**Hong Kong 7s:
US Bows Out
To Scotland
In Plate Semifinal**

**Hong Kong, China
March 22-24, 2002**

Two first-half errors spotted Scotland a 14-0 lead and the decisive margin in the USA's 14-10 Plate semifinal loss at the Hong Kong 7s.

David Fee and Jovesa Naivalu scored unconverted tries and the Eagle defense held steady in the second period, but drenching rain crippled the comeback effort. The USA finished the tournament with a 3-2 record, with wins over Russia and Hong Kong (twice) and losses to Samoa and Scotland.

Thus ends the much-improved USA's abbreviated 2002 World 7s Series. Despite appearing in just six of eleven events, the Eagles twice made the finals and are currently tied for 9th place with France.

"Our inability to retain our own ball under pressure cost us dearly—three tries versus Samoa and two versus Scotland on unforced errors," USA coach John McKittrick summarized the Hong Kong performance.

Yet the second-year coach found several positives. "What we'd worked on in defense came through over three days of the tournament," McKittrick said, "and we're playing

a lot better 7s this year than last."

By way of example, Saturday's 19-7 loss to Samoa contrasts with a 36-0 whitewash in January at Mar del Plata. A year ago at the 2001 Sevens World Cup, the USA dropped a 49-19 decision to Samoa.

The USA opened Hong Kong with a four-try win over Russia. Naivalu scored to make it a 5-5 contest at halftime, while Fee, Jason Raven, and Alex Magleby earned second-half scores. Jone Naqica Koroi converted three of four in Friday's 26-5 win.

Against hosts Hong Kong, center Naivalu scored twice and Conrad Hodgson and Fee added tries as the Eagles cruised 28-19. Two late Hong Kong tries closed the final scoreline.

Pool favorites Samoa, fifth in the 7s Series, took an early 7-0 lead of Saturday's pivotal contest. But Fee's 7th-minute try, which started from a Koroi tap move, brought the Eagles to within two. Samoa scored again after the intermission to go ahead 14-5, and broke the contest open with an unconverted score in the 6th minute of the second stanza.

Having logged a +19 points differential, the US finished behind fellow pool runners-up Wales and Argentina and thus moved into the Plate quarterfinals, again drawing Hong Kong.

On Sunday the USA won still more convincingly with Naivalu, Raven, and Fee scoring in the first half and Koroi adding a conversion. In the second period Raven again, Koroi, and replacement Mose Timoteo breached the defense of Hong Kong, which could add only one try. The 34-12 win sent the Eagles into their semifinal matchup with Scotland.

United States: Paul Emerick, David Fee, Conrad Hodgson, Matt Huckaby, Jone Naqica Koroi, Alexander Magleby, Jovesa Naivalu, Jason Raven (c), Ryan ReBell, Mose Timoteo, Ben Trautwein, Marc Vera. Coach: John McKittrick, Manager: Scott Compton, Physiotherapist: Jeff Ward



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