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As 2012 comes to a close, we'll be running a series of Top 12 of 2012 lists, featuring some of the top photos, players, events and bits of news from the last year. RUGBYMag's official 2012 Awards are chronicled in our November issue.

This time we tackle problems that hopefully are addressed in the New Year. Some are new problems, like dealing with varsity programs on the college level, and others are old, like communication and transparency from the national office and USA Rugby's committees.

Communication

It's an issue at every level. Most unions, leagues and competitions operate with annual general meetings. But many really important things happen between those meetings that people need to be aware of. USA Rugby has to improve its mode of communicating with members. That includes releasing information from committees in a more timely manner and making important decisions, like where National Championships or tests are going to be played, much further in advance. Get the decision out early, and if it needs amendment, the people will tell you.

Uniformity
Not every league has to be run the same, not every region needs to play the same code at the same time and not every team needs to have the same goals. It's OK that Arkansas State, Life and Davenport are playing for a different trophy than Cal, BYU and their Varsity Cup cohorts. It's OK that Army doesn't want to play fall 7s and that BYU doesn't play in the 7s National Championships. It's OK that Colorado mountain towns play 15s in the summer and that in New York, the biggest 7s tournament is played in November. Teams and players have choices, and there's nothing wrong with that. Until a universally irresistible option forces uniformed change, we should get comfortable with mismatched seasons, because time spent bickering about an impossible solution could be put to better use.

Player Retention
Every year really talented high school and college rugby players graduate and leave rugby behind them. Our sport loses players to fraternities, apathy, jobs, etc. We need to get better at turning high school rugby players into college rugby players and college rugby players into senior club rugby players. How? Part of the solution is college teams taking themselves more seriously, and perhaps club teams taking themselves a little less seriously.

Foster High Performance Rugby
Instead of tearing down new varsity or quasi-varsity college programs with complaints about foreign players or low admission requirements, we should be fostering more of them. Established college clubs should be actively working for the success of these well endowed programs instead of gerrymandering league memberships to exclude them. No one likes being beaten by 100, but more scholarship and high performance opportunities are good for the sport as a whole. Don't complain about what you don't have. Rather, work your own advantages and

make big decisions for the greater good.

Support Live Rugby

We're getting better at it, but we have a ways to go. Pay the $12 entry fee to watch the elimination rounds of Denver 7s inside the MLS Stadium. Purchase the ticket to see BYU play NYAC. Make a weekend out of the Collegiate Rugby Championship or an Eagle test. Until live rugby becomes a profitable venture in America, we will experience stymied growth. Become a fan, too.

Olympic Hopes

The Sevens Contracts aren't enough. Players are paid way too little and not enough are under contract. Money needs to be found in the budget (what happened to all the cash we saved in hiring an American 15s coach?) or raised to make the program more competitive. We do not have enough really good 7s players to keep losing them to 15s and still expect to be in the Olympics. Money will help. The Academies are a step in the right direction, but we need to be sprinting there instead of inching there.

Transparency

Everyone acknowledges that the college 7s championships, and the playoffs for college using the new conferences can be confusing, and no one expects things to be perfect, but when coaches and players don't know how seed are assigned, then you've got a problem. USA Rugby staff have to be willing to be publicly wrong, because then they will find people are forgiving. But if they make poor decisions without explaining beforehand how those decisions are arrived at, then they started to cloak things in a veil of secrecy. And that's never good.

NASC

The National Men's 15s All-Star Championships, in some form, has to return. It could be that the Eagles Head Coach picks all the players and arranges the teams, or it could be that he re-engages the eyes and minds of coaches around the country. Whatever, something between club and international has to exist.

The 7s Summer

With the domestic club season edging out into June, and with college 7s having a presence on either end of the summer, and with the best club-level players possibly in the new academy system, what does that mean for the club 7s summer? For years the summer was the backbone of the rugby tournament calendar. But as we got more and more serious about qualifying for the national championship, the window for the tournament has shrunk. If the academies suck out the top 70-100 players, is a national championship still relevant? We figure it will always be, but will clubs and the Olympic Development Program teams share the field?

Foreigners

Specifically, foreigners with the numbers 9 or 10 on their backs. Oh we are delighted to have good halfbacks playing, and the players we've encountered in these positions have been top-notch guys. But we still struggle to develop young American playmakers from the cradle (as it were). Kudos to the Chicago Lions and Belmont Shore, two major clubs that have decided to float or sink with Yank 10s. This country cannot depend on field generals to parachute in from overseas.

Tansparency 2

USA Rugby does what it is supposed to in reporting its finances, but the organization doesn't go into detail, and members repeatedly tell us they would like to see more detail; it would help them feel more a part of the organization. We know $1.46 million was spent on the Men's National Team in 2011, but how does that break down? USA Rugby lists an expense of $877,948 for "Headquarters" but that tells one next to nothing. If you don't want rumors of cost-wasting or lack of competence to have legs, you need to counter them with more detailed facts.

Handling the Tough Times

Tough times are-a-comin', if you believe some. The last time a recession hit, in 2009, USA Rugby got slammed. After basking in a $1 million-plus sponsorship from the National Guard, the organization lost that support and saw its income drop 21%. Depending on membership dues seems a more dependable thing, but it can't become too much, or a dip in membership could also hurt. In recent years, USA Rugby's main income sources have been volatile, but on the membership side that's due largely to a change in the membership cycle that dropped income in 2008. The question is, can sponsorship avoid the million-dollar drops of the past?

USA Rugby Main Income Sources 2007-2011

Year

Total Income

Dues Income

%

Sponsorship Income

%

2007

$ 7,127,581.00

$ 2,152,010.00

30%

$ 918,079.00

13%

2008

$ 8,026,854.00

$ 2,031,535.00

25%

$ 2,728,667.00

34%

2009

$ 8,086,247.00

$ 2,655,466.00

33%

$ 2,367,443.00

29%

2010

$ 6,376,982.00

$ 2,842,553.00

45%

$ 1,005,883.00

16%

2011

$ 7,526,288.00

$ 3,213,641.00

43%

$ 1,510,370.00

20%