

Vikes Better American Counterparts in Vegas

Written by Jackie Finlan

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The University of Victoria [Dobson Images photo] continue their winning tradition, this time taking home the men's college trophy at the Las Vegas Invitational. It was a long and winding road to the final, as two groups contested separate competitions that led to their own finals. Then the two group winners – Victoria and Central Washington – faced off inside Sam Boyd Stadium, in front of a voluminous USA 7s crowd.



Heading into the grand final, one might consider the teams comparable considering their point differentials: Victoria defeated their six previous opponents 209-12, while Central Washington downed the field 204-36. And while CWU competed admirably, it was clear that the Vikes were playing in a different tier, and the Canadians ran away with a 31-5 victory.

“The university only plays against men's teams, so we wanted a chance to play in a university championship,” Victoria coach Doug Tate said. “We have one for Canada coming up on March 2, so I thought it would be good [to play against college teams]. We entered another team in the Men's Aces – that was all of our forwards. And then they all played a 15s game this morning, so they got a lot of rugby today.”

The wear didn't show on Victoria, but it wasn't pure physicality and stellar fitness that saw the Canadians through to the title.

“Some of these guys have played a lot of sevens,” Tate explained. “They come up through a provincial, 7s-only program, so they have a little more knowledge and do a few of little the little things that make all the difference.”

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What in particular?

“They commit too many players to the breakdown, so if they don’t win the ball, then they’re scrambling on defense too much,” Tate said. “Also, some of the passing skills – it’s some of the same problems that the USA national team has. They’re one pass away from putting guys away, and the pass isn’t there – dropped or forward. And the better teams, they’re doing everything moving forward, while others are passing but not actually moving forward. So it’s a little bit stagnant. But they’re physical and athletic, hard to deal with, hard to tackle. They’re strong.”

Victoria is no average college team, however. Aside from playing men’s teams during league, they are well known for their player contributions to Canada’s national side. It’s similar to the University of California’s reputation, but the Vikes have current student-athletes on the field today.

“Phil Mack, Sean Duke, Nathan Hirayama – those are our three players on the national team,” Tate said. “They’ll be playing with us coming up, but they’re playing in the [USA 7s] tournament today. Beau Parker has been on a couple of trips, too, and we have a couple of Canada U20 players here.”

It’s been a very pleasant experience for Tate and company, aside from the fact that they won the whole division. Playing in a big stadium in front of a huge crowd makes an indelible impression on young players. And above all, the players enjoyed the competition.

“It’s important to build a tournament,” Tate referred to the LVI feeding the USA 7s’ popularity. “I used to coach the 7s national team, so when Dubai started, there were only 5,000 or so spectators. They built up that tournament and got things going.

“Yeah, we’ll be back, although we might only bring one team next year. I want to go on tour to Texas,” Tate grinned as he ascended the trophy-presentation platform with his players.”