Written by Jackie Finlan
Wednesday, 13 February 2013 16:06

Every year, all sorts of teams show up to the Las Vegas Invitational – from U14 teams, to national teams, to even touch squads from across the world. The USA 7s' satellite tournament has become such an attractive venue that it has been a breeding ground for the creation of touring all-star teams.

The Beavers International Elite – RugbyMag.com's Women's Spirit Award recipient – emerged in 2012 and played their first games during last year's LVI. In 2013, the Beavers entered three teams in the women's elite, open and college brackets. One couldn't scan Star Nursery, Silver Bowl or the Heritage Park fields without spotting one of the cheekily clad players.

Andy Ireland is the driving force behind the Beavers. Head coach of the Toronto Saracens and University of Toronto, it wasn't until Ireland started coaching a 7s team that he realized there weren't enough opportunities for elite 7s players. So in 2012, he formed the Beavers, brought about 10 girls from Toronto and a handful from the USA and other countries to the LVI. After that outing, players came out of the woodwork, and when the club was ready to tour again in December to Trinidad & Tobago, 30 women RSVPed to the event.

"We've got girls from Canada, USA, New Zealand, Ireland, the Czech Republic and Wales," Ireland reviewed his three teams' rosters. "I've got a database of 50 to 60 players, of which about 40 have actually played for us. Usually someone gets involved because they know someone who played last year, but a lot of it came together through social media – Facebook and so forth."

It's an incredible undertaking to organize three teams at a tournament, especially when players are flying in from across the world and making introductions at the pitch. Ireland spent much of

the LVI shuttling players to and from the airports, redirecting late arrivals, and evaluating players during his first look. It was a stressful, but Ireland had the players' best interests at heart, whether it was making a statement in the Elite division, or simply enjoying some winter rugby.

"You want to be successful, but it's enjoyment at the end of the day," Ireland said of the teams' goals at the LVI. "Some of the players are quite serious because they have the ideal opportunity to be looked at, playing in front of the Canada and USA coaches. Some of the girls have a bit of a point to prove. The Open players were semi-serious, and the College team had a mixture of players. But I wasn't going to push any of them – you can't go out; you have to stay in the hotel. If they wanted to visit The Strip or go to a show, that's fine. I just let them know that they had to be at the hotel the next morning at 7 a.m. in a fit state."

The Beavers' Elite team struggled, as one might expect from a motley team. But they were not short on talent. The roster included well known Canadian players like Lynzi Anderson, Courtney Blum and Natalie Tam, all of whom played for the BC Premier championship team, Velox Valkyries. Liz Snodgrass was the USA's most recognizable player, having flanked for Atlanta during the Harlequins' DI championship run. The roster also included former England U20 player Davinia Monteiro and New Zealand's Tania Rosser, who also played for Ireland, among other notables.

The Open and College teams fared better, with the former going undefeated on day one and the latter getting to the Cup semifinals.

Ireland encourages any player who wants more 7s in their life – regardless of ability – to get in touch with the Beavers. They combine a healthy mix of competition and fun, and that's what keeps Ireland's database of players growing.

To learn more, visit www.beaverssevensrugby.com .