

College 7s Looks to CRC

Written by Alex Goff

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With 19 of the 20 participating teams now selected, the USA 7s CRC is set for the first weekend of June at PPL Park just outside Philadelphia.

[See the list of teams invited here.](#)

Tournament Director Donal Walsh says there will be some changes to the tournament for 2013. The most obvious is the expansion to 20 teams.



“As the event has grown in the Philadelphia region over the last 3 years, we have been experiencing tremendous interest from all collegiate teams around the country about entry and invitations. As a result we have researched, over the last several months, ways we can expand the event to 20 teams,” Walsh told RUGBYMag.com.

“We believe expanding from 16 to 20 teams allows us more flexibility to bring in more teams that have a fan base, and decided for 2013, what better way to introduce this new structure of 20 teams than to focus on teams from our region? St. Joseph’s, for example, has a great rugby infrastructure and has traveled to compete in the Las Vegas Invitational bracket at the USA Sevens Las Vegas for the last two years. In Philadelphia they have an alumni base in the tens of thousands and as a university without a football team, their rugby team has received great exposure on campus over the last number so years.

“Kutztown is a perennial rugby powerhouse on the national stage, and again has supported

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everything USA Sevens have asked of them over the last number of years. We are delighted they have been invited and expect them to produce a lot of very positive results for the tournament both on and off the field.

“University of Pennsylvania have had a very successful season in the Ivy league and have finished as runners-up to Dartmouth (our two time defending champion) in both 15s and 7s rugby. With these teams added to the existing teams of Temple, Penn State and Delaware, we believe we have a tremendous selection of rugby programs from the EPRU and MARFU regions and we are looking forward to seeing them compete against the nation’s best teams this coming June.”

The expansion to 20 teams also will change the competition brackets. The competition will be five pools of four teams, with each team getting three pool matches. At the end of pool play on Saturday, the teams will be re-seeded based on pool finish and tiebreakers. At that stage, the top eight seeds will go into the Cup Quarterfinals. The next four seeds (9-12) will be in the Plate Semifinals, the teams positioned 13- 16 will shoot for the Bowl, and the final four teams (17-20) teams will be in the Shield.

“Every team will play at least four games, with every game on Sunday being a knockout game – win and move forward,” said Walsh. “It’s a more traditional knockout round system, similar to sevens tournaments around the world. And every team will be in the competition with a shot at a trophy victory on the final day.”

The CRC is also working on educating fans with the realities of a 7s tournament, including the fact that your team will play in a few minutes, and then a couple of hours later.

“Sevens by its nature is a long day of rugby, so we have looked (with the opinion of our fans and competing teams) at ways of condensing the action at PPL Park for 2013,” said Walsh. “We are not there yet with a final schedule, but we believe we are getting close to figuring a great plan for the weekend.”

As in 2012, there will be a high school sevens component at this year’s CRC. The High School Rugby Championship will expand to 32 boys teams and 16 girls teams, and will play at a venue other than PPL Park on Friday May 31st , and then in the stadium for the championship matches.

“We’re excited about the high school competition and we’ll be looking for teams from all over the nation to come and compete in this event. Last year we saw a tremendous appetite for 7s rugby at the high school level for both boys and girls, and we believe this piece of the CRC weekend will continue to grow at a rapid pace. As was the case in 2012, in 2013 the high school tournament will be a partnership between Rugby Pennsylvania (<http://www.rugbypa.org/>) our new State-Based Rugby Organization, and will be managed on the ground by Scott Brown, its

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Executive Director,” Walsh said.

As usual, Walsh has received plenty of feedback about the teams invited to the CRC. He reiterated that there are many factors that go into deciding what teams to bring in.

“There are several reasons to invite a team,” he said. “The first thing is, does it fit with their schedule? For some teams, it doesn’t. Second is branding; colleges that are iconic in college sports make sense to the average sports fan. Third, are they good sevens team on the field? Fourth, can they sell tickets and help us build an enthusiastic audience in the stands, to show the folks at home just how exciting rugby as a sport is? We have had teams that have done very well on the field, but acknowledge that they are unable to bring a fan following to the event. Then you have teams like Delaware and Temple, NC State and Life, and those are teams that really bring a fan following. Finally, is the team prepared to embrace the tasks the tournament sets them to do to compete? It’s not easy, and it’s not for everyone. We have a great relationship with every team that has competed at the CRC over the last few years, and will continue to build great relationships with all collegiate programs in the USA.”

Walsh continually addresses the issues around the CRC in terms of how the event grows the sport of rugby as a whole. The CRC has already drastically changed college rugby, and the growth of its high school division will help change high school rugby, too.

All of that is achieved, said Walsh, by bringing more fans to the game.

“The goal of this event is still to educate the American sporting public on how great the sport of rugby truly is, and how accessible the game is to every person in the USA,” explained Walsh. “Success in achieving a high-quality televised rugby event in June serves every rugby coach, player, administrator and fan the entire length and breadth of the nation. Success for the CRC means big success for the sport of rugby. USA 7s LLC and NBC Sports believe we have chosen 20 superb teams that will help us achieve this goal in 2013.”