Crowds and Weather

Las Vegas is usually pretty dependable weather-wise. The previous three years at the USA 7s have produced pleasant, warm, sunny days and maybe a welcome chill come nighttime. This year, it was downright cold at times. The high temperatures were lucky to reach 60, and the wind was dry and chilled.

What that did to the attendance of the 2013 USA 7s can't be measured. Anyone who traveled to Las Vegas specifically to take in the rugby tournament certainly still showed up. Perhaps some locals who might have wanted to try this sport might have stayed home, and it's possible that those from a little further afield (such as notoriously cold-averse Southern California) who had planned to drive in and buy game-day tickets might have chosen not to.

Even so, attendance was up, topping 67,000 for the three days. Consider that when the USA 7s was first held in 2004 fewer than 15,000 showed up for the two days. This event, by that measurement, was a terrific success, and I still think there's more growth to come.

Wild Weekend

The USA 7s also had its share of crazy events. Who would have predicted that the USA, after losing two games, would still be in the hunt for the Cup. All they needed was a 14-point win over

Spain. Leading 10-7 with only a few minutes to so, somehow they achieved it.

Then on Day Three, it was overtime Sunday. Of the top four semifinals (Cup and Plate), three went into overtime. After that, the third-place match between Samoa and Fiji, one of the most fun games to watch that you will ever find, also went into extras (with ramifications, see below). That must be some kind of record.

OK, so to the overtime. Plans were made to have a parachutist float in with the game ball for the Cup Final. But the timing was off thanks to all the overtimes, and while apparently the parachutist was not going to jump if he saw players on the field, it's not easy to see players on the field if they're not moving (such as when they wait for the ball to be retrieved and set up a penalty play). The word didn't get to the plane in time that the jumper should wait, and he didn't flying in hot in the middle of the Samoa v. Fiji Bronze Medal match.

It was, in the end, one of the most delightfully weird things to happen at the event and could only leave you shaking your head and laughing.

Here's the video.

Improvements

One of the great things about holding the USA 7s in Las Vegas is that you get to stay in Las Vegas. Fans stay in beautiful casino hotels, have almost unending options for shows, parties, and food, and get to gamble, if they want, too.

For the players, it is not always easy, even though hotels do a masterful job of separating the party areas from the sleeping areas. Smoking is allowed in casinos and for the players, walking through that air can be difficult. In previous years, word had come out that the players wanted better food – they are fed in a specific banquet room for all meals.

USA 7s LLC (owned by the same company that owns RUGBYMag.com) worked, we know very hard to make things better for the players. Their choice of the Monte Carlo for the team hotel for 2013 was perfect – quiet areas so players could call their families, clean air, and much improved food options. Players, executives, and Tournament Operations Manager Beth Coalter

all said they were delighted with the food. It may not seem like an important things, but it is, and it's good to see USA 7s respond this way.

Volunteers

Every year, dozens of volunteers help out at the USA 7s. Members of the military rugby community, Las Vegas Rugby Academy, and Sin City Irish rugby club, along with a large group of other rugby people from all over the world (thanks especially Mike and Jarvis) give their time to this tournament.

Why? It's not just for entry to the event. They are there because they love this game, and they want it to grow. Helping in the largest rugby tournament in the country (the LVi), and the most-attended rugby event in the country (the USA 7s) helps the game, and many, many people recognize that and help out any way they can.

And don't forget the referees. Those bastions of imperfection give so much effort and time and absorb expenses to be a part of this. The LVI was an enormous undertaking with hundreds of games. They needed refs and touch judges all, and those refs came and did the job.

Am I getting sentimental? Maybe; I guess I kind of do around this time, this time that always re-energizes me for another spring season. But looking out at that huge crowd at Sam Boyd Stadium, and watching to hive of activity around this tournament, and then looking to me left and knowing many more games were held on the grass outside the main field, I am proud of this sport, and this sport in America. Proud of you. I'm even proud of the skydiver.