

## Eagle Front Rowers Working on Scrum

Written by

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The England Saxons team may be a young one, but they will still be a challenge to the USA in Saturday's opening match in the Churchill Cup.

And of all the challenges, the biggest one is the scrum. The USA has a new scrum coach in Fiore Screnci and everyone working in the front row knows that pack-down time will be important.

"Anytime you get a new scrum coach you get some new technique, some new lingo. It's going pretty good so far," said hooker Phil Thiel of Life University. "We're picking up some new little tricks and stuff like that. Fiore is getting used to us and we're getting used to him."

"We've been working [the scrums] in," added prop forward Eric Fry. "It's definitely something we wanted to work on because not all of us have been together as much as we'd like."

The big question has been how Screnci slots in as coach of the scrum after Bill LeClerc was let go last fall after several years with the USA pack. Screnci has a different philosophy than LeClerc, and this is the first time he has assembled with the full national team.

Screnci brings more of a European approach to the scrum, preferring a tighter bind throughout the front eight, and a conventional strike from the hooker (usually right foot, sometimes left foot, hooking the ball between the legs of the loosehead prop).

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This compares to LeClerc's New Zealand style, which calls for a looser (and therefore more comfortable) bind, and the hooker pushing the ball back between his legs.

Both work on similar concepts of how to prepare your body to push, and both, in the end, recognize that the Eagles are still stressed in the scrum, and need a quick strike.

"As with a lot of scrum coaches you want to get the ball in and out as quick as possible," said Thiel. "When you're against the Saxons you want to get the ball in and quickly move it out of there. But most teams are going to work on that."

The players themselves have been working on things, too; most obviously Fry, who has put on weight and power and worked hard on converting himself from, essentially, a college lock/flanker into an international prop.

"I am feeling more comfortable, but definitely have a ways to go," said the former Cal captain, now with Las Vegas. "It's definitely been a challenge. At Cal I played one year at tighthead and it was difficult for me at the college level. When I came up here [to the USA team] it was even more difficult. A lot of the guys have been doing it semi-professionally and professionally. So it has been a challenge, but it's good to be challenges, and I have been working hard at it."

The set piece will be enormously important for the USA as time goes on. Since scrums occur at so many different situations: knock-ons, forward passes, ball not coming out of a ruck, ball not coming out of a maul, option on free kick of penalty, option on kickoff not ten meters, option on not straight lineout throw, then the USA needs to be better at it to be better internationally.