

Punimata Back 100%

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One of the breakout 7s players from last season was powerful forward Nu'u Punimata.

The American Samoa-born 7s prop and former UTEP football player was a huge part of the Old Puget Sound's championship run last summer, and Punimata then broke into the USA 7s team later that fall. He put in some outstanding play in the first three tournaments of the season, before suffering a bad leg injury in Las Vegas.

His season was over then, but Punimata is back once more playing 7s, and that's good news for OPSB and for the USA.

"I feel 100 percent," Punimata told RUGBYMag.com "It took me a couple of tournaments, playing in Victoria and Vancouver, but I got the rust off a little bit and feel good now."

Punimata says he feels strong using the leg, and has been able to change directions despite the injury.

"I was pretty surprised that I was able to do that," said the Seattle-based player. "The medical staff and physical therapy people at USA Rugby did such a good job. For me the hardest thing has been conditioning. For a long time I couldn't really run. But once I was able to run I could do it with minimal pain, and now I feel I am back."

Just in time to help OPSB challenge for another club 7s title. Punimata also reunites with his

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USA teammate Miles Craigwell, who was also new on the USA team this past fall.

“Miles and I first met in camp and we’ve been friends ever since,” he said. “We’re close off the field so to have him on the club now and for us to work out together, is great. I have learned a lot from him.”

He’s not only learning from Craigwell. Team captain Pate Tuilevuka and coach Waisale Serevi .

“Pate, man, is a phenomenal guy,” said Punimata. “I’ve been doing nothing but taking notes from him, seeing what a forward should be doing in 7s. I try to emulate how he plays. He’s a total playmaker, he has great fitness level, he takes charge, is sound on defense. In Vancouver I caught myself on the field watching him play. His rugby IQ ... this guy’s the man.”

And as for Serevi, the 7s legend is held in very high esteem by everyone at OPSB.

“He’s been awesome. “His wealth of knowledge is amazing. I am trying to learn everything from him. He is able to critique our game as a team and make us better, more sound in our fundamentals. He also talks to us individually and make each of us better individually. He sees things almost before they happen.”

Maybe Serevi can divine what will happen with Nu’u Punimata; most figure he’s perfectly placed to push for a place in the USA 7s team once more.