Written by Alex Goff
Thursday, 06 December 2012 23:47

The good news from this past week leading up to the Nelson Mandela Bay 7s is that the referees were happy.

After announcing they would be policing the breakdown very harshly, especially when it came to bridging (leaning down onto a tackled player in order to prevent defenses from challenging for the ball), referees handed out a string of penalties last week in Dubai.

This week at the referee/coaches meetings, two teams, one of them the USA, were complimented for having adjusted well to the new laws.

Of course the adjustment didn't mean victories, but it could translate into a little benefit of the doubt this weekend. And this weekend, the USA has to think they've caught a break. Sure Canada and Portugal are on a roll - both teams are very physical and playing well together - but to have those two teams, plus Zimbabwe in the pool is a lot better than facing New Zealand or South Africa.

"We respect everybody but this is a good pool to be in," said USA Head Coach Alex Magleby. "But we also have things we need to improve on."

Actually, a lot of things. Many of them are long-term, but others they have been working on now. The team's tackle rate is up, but still not where it needs to be, and at least one player got a stern message that he has to make more of his tackles.

Turnovers were another issue, with one player turning the ball over eight times in Dubai. That, said Magleby, has to stop. The coach would also like to see a little more directness on attack and a little less panicking under pressure. That lack of directness might also be a cause of the turnovers.

"There's a litany of things we need to work on, but for this week, we have a few things," said Magleby. "We have to learn that whether we do well or badly, we have to move on. After the fact, you do spend time analyzing what is fixable now. We have a lot of work to do developing young players and working toward developing not only the top 12, but the next 12 and the 12 after that. But our job is to win now, to peak now."

And right now, said Magleby, "we believe we can and should be winning."

The USA opens their 7s weekend in Port Elizabeth, South Africa against Portugal at 12:28pm local time on Saturday, which is 5:28am ET, 2:28am PT. They follow that up with a game against Canada at 3:56pm/8:56am/5:56am.

Saturday's pool play ends at 5:58pm local time against Zimbabwe. That's 10:58am ET, 7:58 am PT.