

## Eagles in a Positive, Confident State of Mind

Written by Pat Clifton

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For the first time in two years, the 7s Eagles are coming off of a Cup Quarterfinal appearance. Making it into the top eight in South Africa didn't just boost the USA's point total, it upped morale and confidence going into a long winter break.

"Confidence level is everything. Confidence levels change expectations. Expectations usually lead into actions," said Shalom Suniula. "It definitely has helped our confidence in training, knowing what we're capable of, and we're going to go with that confidence to Wellington."

Head coach Alex Magleby bridles the confidence a bit by putting recent successes into perspective, pointing out that the Eagles were in a fortuitous pool in South Africa. But he is hopeful the Cup Quarterfinal appearance proves to be the start of a trend instead of a flash in the pan.

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“There’s more confidence in camp than there was previously coming out of Gold Coast, where we were competitive in kind of that New Zealand game and building into that first part of the South Africa game and then the wheels fell off a little bit,” said Magleby.

“For team culture, it’s been really healthy and positive, and when you’re playing a game that really is about inches, confidence can go a long way. I think you see that all the time in tournaments – a team gets their tale up, they get a win against, say a Fiji, in their pool and suddenly they find themselves in a Cup Semifinal and Cup Final. It happens, and I think we’re seeing that happen now.”

Magleby says the team chemistry is in a better place now than it was in 2012. Last year saw players drop contracts voluntarily, a player or two essentially get fired and a coach be pushed out. It was filled with a lot of turmoil.

“We’ve been able to deal with some issues, and that’s really helped the team get better. It’s a growth in terms of on-field stuff, but we’ve had some storms we’d dealt with the last three-to-six months and really the passing of that was the last tournament,” said Magleby.

“There’s now a light at the end of the tunnel. Guys feel like they’ve gone through those storms, guys are more secure in their positions down here, just in life, their role on the team, their teammates – how do they jell with their teammates off the field, things like that, have all really improved, and that’s really the important part. The win to get into the Cup, that really supports that.”

The team is also healthier than it has been. A couple of guys are carrying injuries (Folau Niua and Luke Hume are favoring knees). But for the first time in a while, no one was left out of selections due to injury, and Andrew Durutalo and Blaine Scully are back and eager to contribute.

“We’re second seed in Wellington in our pool, behind New Zealand. The pressure’s there to perform,” said Durutalo. “Once we’ve set the standard, you’ve got to play higher than that, so the boys are just raring to go.”

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