

Captain Talks Game Plan, Moving On

Written by Pat Clifton
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The Eagles started their 2013 USA Sevens campaign the same way they've started every USA Sevens, with a loss. Team USA has never won its first game at its host tournament, and Friday night the Americans embarrassingly fell 26-7 to Australia.

“We made the mistakes and they capitalized. We played rugby in our 22 and not their 22 and those are the big things we’ve got to change,” said captain Matt Hawkins.

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“Outside of that, at the end of the day, we’ve got two more games in our pool to make the best of it, so forget about this one and focus on those. The more we dwell on this, the longer we’re going to sort of worry about it, so we’ve just got to move on.”

But before Hawkins let his team move on, he addressed them as a whole and then in smaller parts, talking about what needs to improve.

From the outside, it would appear the Eagles need to widen their game. Since the match against England in Wellington, USA has favored a contact-heavy power game. Australia must have taken notice, kicking for territory from the get-go to pin the Americans deep in their end. The Eagles took the bait and tried to advance the ball up field with runs tight to the ruck, but the possession, like others in the game, ended in a turnover.

Hawkins says initiating contact was part of the plan, but the other phases of the strategy fell flat.

“We’re not looking at all our options. We had other options. We like to be up front and we like to play that smashmouth rugby. That suits us, but there’s also a time and a place for it,” said Hawkins.

“I think the prime example was when we kicked downfield and Carlin [Isles] chased it. That put us in a position to not be on the fence, and we obviously got the ball and scored. That’s what we want to do. They didn’t have a sweeper, their sweeper was joining the line, so they had no one in the backfield so put the ball on the back foot and take the pressure off us and put the pressure on them. We didn’t do that, so that’s our fault.”

From a captain’s perspective, Hawkins is happy with the team’s effort.

“We’re playing with a lot of heart, we’re playing with a lot of effort, but that doesn’t get you too far,” he said. “You’ve got to play with a lot of heart, but you’ve also got to play with your head and that’s the chemistry we’ve got to find. We’ve got to find the combination between the two.”

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The Eagles next opportunity to strike that balance is against Samoa in Friday's final contest.