[Photo: 11 international women's teams will join the USA in Houston this February during the inaugural IRB Women's Sevens World Series. Ian Muir photo]

From IRB.com

The International Rugby Board has launched the first-ever IRB Women's Sevens World Series. It will take place in four destinations – UAE (Dubai), USA (Houston), China (Guangzhou) and Netherlands (Amsterdam).

The system mirrors the men's series, with each 12-team event featuring six core teams that will play across all four events and six teams that will be invited based on regional tournament rankings, reflecting the IRB's strategic aim to mix the top teams in the world with the best up-and-coming teams from each of the six IRB regions. The six core teams for the inaugural series are Australia, Canada, England, Netherlands, New Zealand and USA.

IRB Chairman Bernard Lapasset said: “The IRB Women’s Sevens World Series is an exciting and significant development, not only for the women’s game but for all of rugby, as we continue to grow the game around the world. For the past 13 years, the top Sevens athletes in the men’s game have competed in a world series environment, and now all women players can also aspire to compete at the same level, test themselves against the very best and hone their skills.

“This first international series for our top women’s players will shine a light on the sheer quality and athleticism they have reached in a relatively short time, and ensure that the women’s game continues on its sharp rise toward its Olympic debut in 2016.”

"We are delighted to be going to Dubai, USA, China and the Netherlands in our inaugural year. Dubai will guarantee the Series’ tremendous global exposure with the event sitting alongside the men's, while the events in USA, China and the Netherlands reflect the incredible appetite for women's rugby in these key markets, as seen with the superb results of their teams on the world stage in recent years."

IRB Rugby Committee member and Women's World Cup Sevens 2009 winning captain Cheryl Soon (Australia) added: “This new series will not only provide competition, it will also increase the exposure and profile of the women’s game globally. Whether running alongside the very successful HSBC Sevens World Series event in Dubai or reaching new and strategically important markets around the world, we believe the series will maximize the opportunities for growth of the women’s game in all aspects.”

The IRB Sevens World Series concept is in line with key strategic objectives set out in the IRB Women's Rugby Plan, expanding the women's Sevens international competition model, particularly at the elite level of the game.

IRB Women's Sevens World Series 2012/13

Round 1 – UAE: Dubai, November 30 – December 1, 2012 – 7he Sevens Stadium
Round 2 – USA: Houston, Texas, February 1-2, 2013 - BBVA Compass Stadium
Round 3 – China: Guangzhou, March 30-31, 2013 - Guangzhou University Town Stadium
Round 4 – Netherlands: Amsterdam, May 17-18, 2013 - NRCA Stadium

Rugby World Cup Sevens, Moscow, June 28-30, 2013