There were plenty of highlights during day one of the Houston 7s; these were our favorites:

THE Game – England 7-5 New Zealand
If there was any question whether the England v New Zealand rivalry from 15s translated into 7s, today ensured that question will never be raised again. Because the answer is: Big time.

The hits were extra hard – with England's Heather Fisher crushing it in open field and in tight – and play got chippy – like when New Zealand's Linda Itunu somehow evaded a yellow card for a monstrous, unwrapped hit.

New Zealand always looked poised to score, as Carla Hohepa, Sarah Goss, SElica Winiata – really anyone on the team – motored toward the tryline. But England's defense was spot on and determined, and pulled players down meters from the goal line.

The game ended in England's favor, but it wasn't just the tight score that made the game memorable. It was the example of the best women's 7s in action, and that leaves an indelible impression on one's mind.

THE Play
There were some dazzling performances today, but one play in particular stands out: Lauren Doyle's game-ending try. The USA had relinquished a 17-point lead to South Africa, and with 15 seconds left in regulation, RSA had turned the tide: 19-17 to South Africa. The referee signaled

that there was time for one more kickoff, and South Africa sent it straight into touch. The USA took their free kick at midfield, and quickly got the ball to Doyle on the wing. What should have been a shove into touch turned into a fantastic sideline break that ended in the corner of the try zone.

That play wasn't only significant because the USA took control of their fate, but the pressure was put on the youngest, most inexperienced player on the squad, she came through like a true professional.

The Crowd Favorite – Trinidad & Tobago

The island nation had the unfortunate draw of playing against New Zealand, England and the Netherlands. The Kiwis shut them out 50-0, England followed with a 48-0 win, and the Netherlands had built a 38-0 lead in the second half of their match.

But after some exhilarating breaks and flashes of brilliance, T&T was finally rewarded with five points, thanks to the thundering running of Juliana Straker. Straker herself was already a player of note, having shocked the audience with a primetime stiffarm on England's Marlie Packer.

T&T wasn't the crowd favorite because they were the perpetual underdogs, but because they fought all day long to get that lone try, and deserved the acclaim.

The Unassuming Star

Russia in itself is an unassuming star. The team's profile does not fit that of the typical 7s team – they're all small and slight. But Dubai was Russia's coming out party, and fans were eager to see if their success was a fluke or legit.

Russia hits hard, and we saw that against Australia (which won 15-10 in round 3). They run as fearlessly as they tackle, and Ekatarina Kazakova was our favorite. She's a little taller than some her teammates, but she's skinny and doesn't look like she's got much muscle at all. By time and time again, we watched as striker bounced out of contact, kicked her legs through thigh-tackling defenders, and glided into the try zone three times today.

Never-Say-Die Nod

Japan is easily the tiniest team in Houston, and likely any international circuit, but they've got a healthy Napolean Complex that allows them to play 10 times bigger than their size. That doesn't necessarily translate into wins, but you'd never know that Japan was defeated the way they continually burst off the line and meet any opponent with square shoulders. They were rewarded with a solid 17-12 win in the final round of play, so hopefully that salves any bruises.