A brilliant set of games are poised to take place during day two of the Houston 7s. The Cup Quarterfinals kick off the action, and any team playing to their full potential has the chance to come out with the win.

The day starts with England v the Netherlands. The two are coming out of Pool A, and are familiar with the specifics on each other's rosters here in Texas. The Roses are a different side entirely from the one that finished 7th in Dubai. Only two players – Sarah Laybourn and Sarah Guest – were kept on, while stars like Heather Fisher, Kat Merchant, Michaela Staniford and Emily Scarratt, to name a few, were added to punch up the lineup. They more than did the trick and that infusion of athleticism saw England past Dubai champion New Zealand in a thrilling 7-5 game yesterday.

When the two quarterfinal opponents met in pool play yesterday, the Netherlands scored first and help the lead until just before the half. Flyer Kelly van Harskamp is always a threat out wide, but she lacks the physicality that pervades the England squad. Hard workers like Lorraine Laros and Annemarije van Rossum make up for what they lack in size with a tenacious go forward and quick reactions.

We're picking England in this one, and they'll see the winner of Canada v New Zealand.

It's tempting to rely on ranking alone in picking the victor of the second quarterfinal, but the Kiwis have earned it. The team is built like a team of perfectly carved 7s players, and their team speed is fantastic. Players like Shakira Baker and Sarah Goss compliment well knowns like Carla Hohepa and Portia Woodman. Adding to the entertainment that is synonymous with New

Zealand's play, many players sport long, unfettered ponytails, which lends even more frenzy to side-stepping breakaways and pummeling tackles.

Canada has brought some youth with them to Houston, but the core of stalwarts like Mandy Marchak, Ashley Steacy, Jen Kish and Brittany Waters anchor the team. Magali Harvey had a good day around the pitch, and despite her young age, has become the go-to finisher for Canada. That said, New Zealand's the choice for this game, and if all goes to plan, then a rematch of the fantastic England v New Zealand game will unfold in the Cup semis.

On the other side, the USA takes on Russia. The Americans have not faced the revamped Russian side, which impressed the field in Dubai (winning the Plate), but supported their reputation yesterday. Russia is small, fast and have a fantastic work rate that overwhelms slow-to-adjust defenses. The USA struggled at times in that respect, not shifting fields quickly enough for a weakside break, and they'll have to be on their toes for players like Baizat Khamidova and Ekaterina Kazakova, who are incredibly slippery.

The USA played well yesterday, so they certainly have the momentum to defeat a good Russian team. The Eagles conducted themselves with professionalism in pool play, keeping their spirits high after a draw with Canada (their best finish against their North American rivals in more than a year) and last-play victory over South Africa. They played to their full potential against Argentina, banking a 41-0 win that shot them to the top of Pool B. In particular, we were impressed with Kelly Griffin, who was always in line for a tight offload; Nathalie Marchino, who stole ball out of the rucks and found those half-gaps in the center of the field; and 21-year-old Lauren Doyle, who has shown great pace and composure for such a young athlete (she won the South Africa game).

We're leaning toward the USA on this one, but they'll have to play the best game of their Houston 7s campaign today. The offense is there; if the defense is spot-on, then they'll move on to see the winner of Australia v South Africa.

We're picking Australia in this one. They beat Russia 15-10 in a very physical game in round 3, and rely on the solid play of standouts like Tricia Brown, Nikki Etheridge and Gemma Etheridge. They're missing their top scorer from Dubai – Emilee Cherry – and that might be enough to keep them out of the final, but the team has adjusted well enough to go 3-0 on day one.

South Africa comes in as the 7th seed, and they won't be able to repeat their Dubai final's appearance here in Houston. They play an unpredictable and yet physical game, and have the potential to score tries quickly (e.g., game v USA yesterday), but they lack the overall polish that will put them past more solid teams. Yolanda Meuring is an excellent playmaker, while Phumeza Gadu and Nosiphiwo Goda did well to find the try zone yesterday.

Predictions
Cup Semifinals
England v New Zealand
USA v Australia

Plate Semifinals
Netherlands v Canada
Russia v South Africa