Nathalie Marchino has been at the epicenter of the USA's successful Houston 7s campaign thus far. When the Eagles struggled with consistency against Russia – a game that ended 15-7 in the USA's favor – Marchino was rallying spirits with a linebreak or pummeling through a breakdown for the steal (Photo right: Paul Rudman).

"We were a little bit nervous given what happened in Dubai, so we came out a little tentative," Marchino said of the handling errors against Russia. "But once we got a couple of hits in and got the flow going, it started to click for us."

It's something that has plagued the Eagles in Houston. The USA is coming away with the wins, but they're making it difficult on themselves by fighting back from a deficit.

"We're learning a lot about ourselves in this tournament," Marchino said. "In the past, being scored on first would have been something that would have deflated us, but it felt different for some reason this tournament. We've let other teams score on us first in three of the four games, but you can feel now that we have the confidence to overcome that. It lights a fire under our butts."

Russia ignited that fire four minutes into their Cup Quarterfinal, when the ever-dangerous Baziat Khamidova dotted down for the game's first try.

"We played them last year in London, and they've improved immensely in that time," Marchino said of Russia. "We knew they were going to be much more physical. They're really strong runners and have excellent skills, so we knew we had to be very patient and organized on defense, and really stick our tackles. In the first half, we didn't really do that and that led to a try for them. So that's something we focused on during halftime."

Marchino accounted for both tries in the second half, dotting down the go-ahead points and adding the cushion with a fine breakaway.

“I am definitely a player who likes to probe,” Marchino said of her ability to freeze defenders. “I used to be the fast player, but I’m not anymore. Everyone is getting faster and a little better, so I’m utilizing more of my vision.”

Marchino is certainly not slow and has enjoyed her share of sideline breaks. “When you have Lauren Doyle on your outside, it sure feels like you’re damn slow,” she said.

Now the USA is onto the Cup Semfinals against Australia, a team that has caused the Eagles some trouble in the past. They’ll need to execute at a higher percentage, and find some way to start the match 100% fired up.

“We’re mentally focused at the beginning of the match but it seems like we’re still taken aback in the first few minutes, trying to find a rhythm,” Marchino said. “I don’t know what we need to do to fix that, but it’s something we need to address. It’s not a question of focus – we know why we’re here and what we want to accomplish. We’re just a little slow out of the gates. Hopefully we’ll learn to score first and maintain the lead but it’s good to see that we have the confidence to come back from a deficit.

“Personally this is a great accomplishment for the team,” Marchino said of the semifinal berth. “Even though we know we’re putting in the work, we don’t know what other teams are doing – we don’t know what to expect. Now, it’s every team’s tournament. Everyone’s doing a lot of good work to improve their programs. Obviously we’re happy to be in the semis, happy with what we’re doing. Our goal is to go as far as we can take this. As a team we’re happy where we are but we’re not satisfied.”