The USA has every reason to be happy. The Women are heading to the Houston 7s final against England, and not only have drastically improved upon their previous outing at an international event, but have also shown that they can run with the top teams in this professional age.

That's not to say there isn't a lot of work to be done. The Eagles have let the opposition set the tone early, and although that was the case against Australia in the Cup semifinals, that didn't translate into a scoreboard deficit to erase.

"They didn't give me a heart attack in this game," USA Women 7s coach Ric Suggitt said. "They played how they know they can play, and it's good to see them express themselves like that, because they work extremely hard. I'm pretty pleased with their performance."

Suggitt always reiterates that all of the credit goes to the players, and jokes that he's fortunate his athletes "put up" with him. Basically, Suggitt realizes that once the players on the field, he cannot control the game from the sidelines.

"I leave that up to them," Suggitt said of the corrections that need to be made at the beginning of the game. "They have to sort themselves out; it's a mental game. 'How do we prepare, prepare, prepare to make sure we're mentally focused to start the game,' and they were there on this one. Their defense was bang on, and they're starting to find their legs."

Speaking of legs, Lauren Doyle and Vix Folayan were pretty outstanding against the Aussies. Where Folayan flourished on the wing on offense, Doyle found more action in defense.

“Did she ever do a fantastic job hustling back,” Suggitt beamed when he recalled Doyle’s fortitude in the chase. “That’s the work ethic of this young team. They’re never going to give up; they’re going to chase all the breaks, and she did a fantastic job. Kimber [Rozier] stepped up in the last two games as well. The Aussies made big breaks, and she made the midfield tackle, so a credit to her and her defense. Deven [Owsiany] came on when [Kelly] Griff[in] came off, and she chased 65 meters to make sure they didn’t get an easy one. As always, it was a total team effort.”

These are highlights of the USA’s 17-5 win over the Aussies, but Suggitt insisted that this is not the Eagles at their best.

“They’re in the first year of the residency program, so we’re trialing things, throwing everything into the soup bowl and seeing what comes out at the end of the day,” Suggitt said. “I’m happy with them, I’m happy for them. But let’s not get too excited, because they have one more to go and it’s going to be a really tough team that they play against next.”

England. The Roses have been the most consistent, exciting team in the tournament thus far, a vast improvement from the young team that finished 7th in Dubai. The USA will have to play their best game of the day, and hopefully that will be enough.

[Photo: Katie Dowty against Australia. Paul Rudman photo]