

No tournament team was named for the Houston 7s, the second stop on the IRB Women's Sevens World Series, but if RugbyMag.com were in charge of handing out nominations, then following 12 players would get the nod:

The Heavy Hitters (4)

They all made the crowd wince with a bone-crushing hit at some point during the tournament, but also squeal with excitement as they showcased great speed and fine open-field running.



Jen Kish (Canada) – She glued Canada together. On a team with a significant amount of youth, Kish carried the weight of the team on her shoulders, especially after Ashley Steacy was injured. The prop can juke, jump and flatten – a great combo for any player, especially a forward.

Heather Fisher (England, MVP) – An obvious one. Yes, she was the tournament MVP, but some of the most memorable moments occurred from her throttling tackles – whether they were with squared shoulders or from across the field, catching a ballcarrier offguard and hurtling forward. Every time she neared a ballcarrier, the command, “Pass, pass, PASS!” entered one’s mind.
[Photo right, Paul Rudman]

Linda Itunu (New Zealand) – One of those athletes who plays with little regard for their body. But if you're going to play for New Zealand, then you better be able to do more than flatten a ballcarrier. Itunu comes through on all fronts – a solid, straight-up runner with the ability to step like her more well known teammates.

Gemma Etheridge (Australia) – She wasn't the fastest or the highest-scoring on the third-place team, but she was the mainstay of the defense, and we really respect her hard work. She rarely made a mistake either, which came in handy during Australia's unbelievably long win over New Zealand.

The Playmakers (4)

These players know their teammates so well and do everything in their power to enable their success. But they hesitate to attack space when the time is right, and therefore always enjoyable to watch.

- **Nathalie Marchino (USA)** – Had the USA upset England in the final, then Marchino would have won tournament MVP. She's incredibly smart, and has changed her playing profile as she ages out of the "Thoroughbred" category. She relies on her vision to set up teammates, but also contributes with a turnover in the ruck or the intercept try.

- **Annemarije van Rossum (Netherlands)** – She's tiny and quick, but she takes advantage of every opportunity that presents itself, whether scampering weakside off a free kick from a scrum, or running the perfect under line against a defense that might flatten her on a straight-up tackle. It was a close call between her and teammate Lorraine Laros, but we like van Rossum's flair a bit more.

- **Baizat Khamidova (Russia)** – She actually led tries-scored tally, topping out at nine – three better than #2 Nathalie Marchino. But it wasn't because she waited out on the wing until there was an overload. She chased down teammates' breakaways, switched fields, and worked hard to find space in which she could stretch her legs.

- **Yolanda Meuring (South Africa)** – Meuring was surrounded by shifty, fast players, and she used her keen vision to put them into the try zone. She didn't do half bad herself, running in three tries, and ended up fifth on the points-scored list thanks to an incredible boot that slotted sideline conversions. She's accompanied by an elite group of kickers, which includes Laros and England's Alice Richardson.

The Finishers (4)

It's not enough to have flat-out speed. Finishers have to use their pace on defense, too, and be able to make that full-speed tackle.

- **Magali Harvey (Canada)** – The wing had some fantastic cover tackles that stretched the width and length of the field. Her efforts were truly remarkable on defense, and on offense she ran in her share of tries, and her boot was key to Canada's excellent kickoffs.

- **Lauren Doyle (USA)** – The 21-year-old might still be getting her feet on the international stage, but the girl can run, both in pursuit and when taking on that final corner-flagger attempting to stop her try. She really impressed in Houston, and she's only going to get much, much better.

- **Joanne Watmore (England)** – We hesitated at first to put Watmore on the list, as she only played on day two of the tournament. However, in those three hard games, she scored five tries and finished third on in the competition. While Michaela Staniford was a candidate, she displayed some hesitation going for the corner, where Watmore knew and trusted her speed a bit better.

- **Isabel Fontanarrosa (Argentina)** – is the only non-Cup participant we put on the list, but her speed highlighted an Argentinean that struggled to win games. So you know Fontanarrosa played a lot of defense, and she closed down gaps incredibly quickly. Once Argentina moved into the Bowl competition and had more of fighting chance, Fontanarrosa shined with four tries.

RugbyMag's Houston 7s Tournament Team

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