Two Canadian Maple Leafs squads will contest tomorrow's Women's Elite 7s championship, the last Las Vegas Invitational final to be decided. The USA entered two select sides as well, with the Stripes finishing third after a 21-5 victory over Japan, and the Stars winning the Plate after Emperor's Atlantis forfeit.

In previous LVIs, fans might have been disappointed to not see the USA inside the stadium for the final – and they still probably are – but this tournament had different objectives and constraints, especially compared to last weekend's Houston 7s.

First of all, 12 of the athletes had played in the Houston 7s, which occurred last weekend. As the LVI wore on, some of that fatigue became more visible than the athletic tape wrapping Vanesha McGee's and Nathalie Marchino's legs [Photo: Ian Muir]. They still got their licks in - fond memories include McGee working her full-sprint fend on the sideline – but the retreat on defense began to slow, and the chase-downs became less enthusiastic.

The men are familiar with this kind of turnover, playing in Wellington and then the USA in consecutive weekends, but it's a new kind of recovery for the women. That said, Canada crafted their rosters similarly to the USA's. Maple Leafs 1 included all but two Houston 7s players (Ashley Steacy, who was injured, and Brittany Waters), while the Maple Leafs 2 had some less experienced players, save Barbara Mervin, Megan Gibbs and Cheryl Phillips.

Roster tactics aside, Canada had a little bit more to prove in Las Vegas. They finished a disappointing 7th in Houston, while the USA advanced to the final against England. It was

important in terms of international ranking but also for the morale of the Eagles.

“Dubai was a major upset for us, so it was definitely an improvement,” USA 7s hooker Deven Owsiany said. “And getting to the [Houston 7s] final was great, but losing it – it’s still disheartening. But it’s a great feeling knowing that we *can* do that. … It’s motivation, because we know we didn’t peak or play our best. [It would have been tough if] we nailed every pass, nailed everything, and then still lost.”

While certain areas of improvement could be addressed here in Las Vegas, the introduction on new players brought its own set of goals. Newly contracted Sadie Anderson and Jane Paar, and first-timers Amanda Street, Natalie Kosko and Katie O’Malley mixed up the veteran lineups.

“It’s a great experience to get people up to our level,” Owsiany said. “[USA 7s coach] Ric [Suggitt] said this has been the hardest decision he’s had to make. He has a pool of 24 players who could all be on the next tour to China or Hong Kong. It’s a great thing as the younger players get better. They’re pushing us to get better, to make the whole program amazing.”

Even as selections loom for the upcoming tours, Owsiany insisted that the veterans have a program-minded mentality.

“We’re really trying to make our team a big family,” Owsiany said. “We want people to know that they can be on this level and not feel like they have to prove themselves. We want them to come and push us, and we’ll push them along to make the program better.”

So while results and performance are never an afterthought, the indoctrination of the newer players and the recovery of the “old” were also very important this weekend.