Written by Pat Clifton
Wednesday, 11 May 2011 16:48

On some level, the Harvard vs. Davenport semifinal is a match between the haves and the have-nots. At first glance, you'd think Harvard, with a National Championship and more DI Final Fours than any other non-CPD team, would be the haves. But you'd be wrong.

Being about as elite and upper-crust a school as there is, it's probably a stretch to consider Harvard a have-not, but compared to the small, commuter school from Grand Rapids, Mich., it is, at least in the realm of rugby.

"Harvard has 41 varsity teams, which is more than any other college, and something like 65 club teams, all on a postage-sized stamp of land, and there isn't enough land or space to go around. There isn't enough resources at the college to help give rugby what it needs," said Crimson coach Dave Gonzales.

"We are without a doubt a junior club, despite the fact that we have potential untapped resources. It's not as easy as just going out there and saying, 'OK, we're going to raise the money and we're going to go out there and build a field.' Firstly, there isn't lots of land in Cambridge. Two acres in Cambridge is millions and millions of dollars. You can't just put a building up. Secondly, you can't really have more than a varsity sport. And finally, because of the Title IX prong, there's been some issues in the past."

The Panthers, as varsity athletes, don't have the same issues in terms of finding real estate to practice and play on. They have a pitch and a grounds crew that grooms it. Their jerseys, equipment, travel and other expenses are paid for. And, yes, they do have scholarships.

"I think there must be something about varsity," said DU coach Kruger Van Biljon. "People think everybody's on full rides. We don't have that. We've got partial scholarships. It's not much.

We’re a private institution, so the scholarship we can offer is basically a state tuition.”

Still, just the word ‘scholarship’ is a recruiting tool.

Recruiting for Harvard? Well, every Ivy League sports team, varsity or not, has to deal with the ramifications of being Ivy in recruiting. You obviously can’t just go get the best athlete, because of the unparalleled academic considerations.

Another caveat to being Harvard; the 24-hour rule. Harvard students, National semifinalists or not, must take their final exams within 24 hours of their classmates. To accommodate, a proctor is flying out with the team Thursday to administer exams to Crimson players not only Friday before the semifinal match, but Saturday morning.

When Davenport and Harvard step on the pitch at Steuber Stadium, the ancillary things, like scholarships and long-forgotten about test questions, will fade into the background. But the have and have-not scenario doesn’t disappear as easily.

Davenport has standout individual players like strong-side flanker Ryan Hargraves, prop forward Angus Machellan and flyhalf/center/anything-you-want back J.P. Eloff. Harvard does not have a stud. The Crimson don’t have a household name. They are a team, in every sense of the word.

Heck, Harvard doesn’t really even have a style of play. Davenport has a mobile pack and lethal backline players, which allows them to play an open game and really move the ball out wide.

Harvard has a pack of chameleons who will play whichever way it takes to get a win.

“The style is that we’re going to play what we see, and it could vary from week to week, and it will vary from week to week. The style is, you’re not completely sure what you’re going to get,” said Gonzales. “It looks like (Davenport’s) got four or five guys who can score tries, so we’ll come out and adapt to what we see in front of us.”

Harvard vs. Davenport will be available on USA Rugby’s UStream channel at 4pm local time.