

Women's DI Pool B Preview

Written by Jackie Finlan
Wednesday, 27 April 2011 13:50

Blaine, MN, will be a busy city this weekend, hosting eight of the 16 women's DI college playoff teams. Pools B & C will spend Friday and Saturday naming their representatives to the Final Four in mid May.

In pool B, Pacific Coast champion BYU's Women's Cougar Rugby plays UCLA, while West champion Colorado State takes on MARFU's third seed, Navy, on Friday. The victors will face each other Saturday during the quarterfinals.

BYU is coming off a huge win against Stanford, defeating the national finalist 24-7 for the Pacific Coast title two weekends ago. The ramifications were huge, considering that Stanford as the Pac Coast #2 team is in the same pool as reigning champ Penn State. The second-best team in the Pacific Coast is certainly better than its #8 seed overall, but seeding reflects BYU's inability to play in last year's quarterfinals (games were on Sunday).

Both BYU and Stanford knew what was on the line at the Pac Coast championship, but it was the Cougars who pulled through.

"The girls are working hard at practice to stay sharp," BYU coach Tom Waqa said. "Stanford game was a good one for us, but we can't afford to dwell on that. We are definitely not underestimating any team going forward. We have played some really good teams from NorCal this semester, but we will keep our guard up.

"UCLA is a good team - they have made it to the Sweet 16," Waqa said of his team's first round opponent. "The challenge could come from anywhere. We are bringing our full arsenal, not just a weapon."

Both UCLA and BYU are led by their backs. Waqa has all stars in Kara Remington, Star Bollinger, Kristi Jackson and Rebekah Siebach, to name a few. The Bruins are led by flyhalf Tia Blythe, who's really the guiding light for the Southern California team. Captain Cassie Tong, prop Kat Telles and wing Alex Morrisette are also important around the field.

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"The team is looking good and we have been working on various areas of our game having watched video footage of BYU," UCLA coach John Wooler said. "They are a big and fast team and like to use their backline. I have tried to build a strategy for the game and hopefully it will work out. The key to a game like this is to minimize turnovers and keep possession of the ball, create good phases of play and look to attack holes in the defense."

It would be an upset for UCLA to defeat BYU in the first round, but it's familiar territory for UCLA.

"Last year we beat the higher ranked team [UC Davis], so we know we can do it as long as we play a very tight and solid game," Wooler said. "But if BYU underestimate us as did UC Davis last year, there could be another upset."

In the other pool B match, Colorado State and Navy face off for what should be a great game. CSU has battled some injuries and coach Jenna Middleton has used this week to see if they're up to par health wise.

"Navy is going to field a very physical and athletic team, so I have really challenged the team to show up as the smarter team on the field," Middleton said. "We have several very experienced players who make excellent decisions, led by 8 Wendy Sherman, fullback Sarah Rossi, and scrumhalf Jozy Gessner, but I have pushed the rest of the team to get to that same level of mental fitness and hopefully that all comes together on Friday."

It'll be an interesting experience for the 25-year-old Middleton, who is rounding out her first year as coach. "My inexperience as a coach has sometimes been a bit of a struggle for all of us - especially those who have played for Bryn Chivers or Karl Barth," Middleton confessed. "But they have allowed me to develop as a coach as they develop as players. It's a big part of the reason we've had this much success so far, we've all grown together, so that will be a strength for us as well."

This is CSU's first trip to Sweet 16s, and they have the difficult task of facing a team that's familiar with the Final Four. That experience, driven by the seasoned coach Sue Parker, will put the West champ at a disadvantage. The MARFU #3 seed is lower ranked but the young, inexperienced team really challenged Penn State during the MARFU semifinals (31-10 loss),

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disrupting the national champ's potent offense with gritty defense. This will certainly be an opening-round match to watch.

Read more about [Pool A](#) , [Pool C](#) and [Pool D](#) .

Friday

Pool B Round of 16 - Blaine, MN

Game 1 - 5pm (EST): BYU v UCLA

Game 2 - 5pm (EST): Navy v Colorado State

Saturday

Consolation Quarterfinals

Game 3 - 5pm (EST): Game 1 loser v Game 2 loser

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Quarterfinals

Game 4 - 5pm (EST): Game 1 winner v Game 2 winner