

## Service Academy Game a Special Moment

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Generals and Admirals on the sidelines. A vocal, large crowd. The prime of our military future on the field. The Army-Navy rugby game is unmatched for a sporting event that means something else as well.

And it did not disappoint. Army held off Navy 34-27. There is no “yeah but” about this game. It was that tough, that close, that difficult. The Midshipmen and the Cadets thundered into each other all day, and Navy almost tied it at the end.

For West Point, the win meant a surge of pride, an undefeated Eastern Conference season, and not having to travel to play BYU this weekend.



“It was perfect,” said Army Head Coach Rich Pohlidal. “Great crowd, great refereeing from Paul Bretz. Perfect weather conditions. And two great teams.”

The game is the culmination of the work Pohlidal’s coaching staff has been able to put together. Out of favor with the USA National Team, Bill LeClerc was hired on by West Point to teach the Cadet scrum.

“This was my first Army-Navy game,” said the New Zealand-born US citizen. “I thought it was pretty exceptional. I was really impressed.”

LeClerc, of course, was focused mainly on the battle between the eights of each squad in the scrum.

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“The guys got really stuck in,” said LeClerc. “We had a good strong engagement and I think with Navy have a big, strong pack the scrums stayed up and were a great contest.”

Conscious of what awaits the graduates academies, all coaches shied away from the word “battle,” but, yes, it was battle of sorts.

“We knew they weren’t going to go down easily,” growled LeClerc.

Former USA 7s player Justin Hundley was working with the backs, and shrugged away some of Army’s good fortune.

“We scored on an intercept, and also on a quick tap, so that was a little fortunate,” said Hundley. But prompted to acknowledge that they also betray smart play, Hundley nodded. “Most of our good scoring chances came out of good defensive pressure, and I was really pleased with the defensive pressure and our getting quick turnover ball. Ben [Leatigaga] made a great read to intercept the pass, but it was from our defensive pressure.”

There were big plays by everyone along the way. No. 8 Marshall Moten, openside Tim Dean, and of course Will Holder, who scored 19 points, and Leatigaga, who added the other 15. On the opposing side Chase Burge was massive at lock, and while they lost Sean Rohrs early, Seamus Siefring was a key player, too.

And with this being a clash of military brother against brother, it was only appropriate that brother actually play against brother – Army lock Aaron Retter suited up against Navy prop Jason Retter.

“It was something special to see both of them play against each other,” said coach Nate Conkey, adding, about the victory. “This is huge for us. To be able to play at home where we know we can do well, in front of our fans, it’s a huge win if only for that.”

Back then to Pohlidal, who thought first of the game ahead.

“We haven’t studied Utah a great deal yet but we will; we know they’ve got a lot of outstanding players and we will have to be ready.”

And then back to Saturday’s game.

“To see the two teams line up for the national anthem, that was an incredible moment. It was just a great day.”