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It would seem at first glance there are two clear favorites in the West DI pool that includes Olympic Club, Austin, Dallas and the Sacramento Lions. Olympic Club and Austin both have histories of being very dangerous in the DI postseason, and both have had stellar seasons. Sacramento and Dallas could be considered surprises to be in the Sweet 16. However, both made a statement in their Round of 32 wins.

Sacramento, a team sometimes knocked for stamina, outscored OMBAC 22-10 in the second half to advance. Dallas, part of a Texas Union that was swept by the West-North in the Round of 32 last year, beat the Kansas City Blues without the services of Kelly Kolberg, their best player.

However, both the Lions and Reds should know they’re up against a different level of competition in Chula Vista, Calif. Saturday and Sunday. OMBAC was without two packie starters, who were at the Eagles domestic camp, and their best player, flyhalf and game breaker Zach Pangelinan. Austin, who received a bye in the Round of 32, should be as healthy and stocked as they’ve been all season.

Dallas knows it’s going to be the smaller team when standing across the white line from O-Club, but for the Reds, who’ve struggled in recent years, just being in the dance is an accomplishment.

“There is no coach in this nation that is prouder of a group of guys than I am with my

teammates. It is basically the same group of guys that were getting hammered by 60 points almost every game just two years ago," said Dallas player/coach Matt Rawle. "It is very gratifying seeing all those guys with smiles on their faces as they leave the field now, as opposed to coming off with heads down after having a basketball score run up on them.

"We know we have a huge task in front of us in Chula Vista, but one thing this group of guys don't do is back down from anyone, so we will give those boys from Olympic Club our best shot, and you never ever know."

Compounding the potential for an upset is O-Club's recent history with not being able to stop a dynamic fullback, which is precisely what Kolberg is. Last season in the Round of 8, O-Club went head-to-head with Las Vegas and Mike Palefau. They managed to contain the speedster in the first half, but Palefau made them pay in the second, leading the Blackjacks to victory. Head coach Ray Lehner says his team is set on not have a repeat performance.

"Obviously, we learned a lot of lessons against Las Vegas last year, what happens if you kick a ball to a dangerous fullback who's got his shoulders up field and can probably hurt you, and we plan on avoiding that this time around," he said.

"A lot of the teams we play in the Northern California have some pretty sharp counter attackers, so we manage a game plan that avoids that. We kick with purpose, is what we like to say, and not hap hazardly, giving the ball to a dangerous player."

Olympic Club's semifinal bid against Las Vegas last season was led by the boot of flyhalf Peter Galicz. Galicz is at fullback now, and he'll be helped out immensely with the kicking duties by Keegan Engelbrecht.

"Keegan is a great field manager. He really understands the lay of the land, certainly our pattern of play, so we give him pretty good license to make those decisions (on when to kick and when not to kick)," said Lehner. "Peter has been playing great, and he and Keegan have a pretty good understanding and match up well back there, so I'm pretty happy when we have to play field position."

Dallas's and Sacramento's impressive Round of 32 victories make this region more compelling than perhaps would have been originally thought, but O-Club and Austin remain the teams to beat.