Written by Bernie Decker
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Northern Louisiana looked crisp and sharp in their 38-17 victory over a scrappy Fresno side in the first match of the DII semifinals at the Infinity Sports Complex' turf pitch Saturday. Fresno staked NoLa to an early lead they were unable to surmount as an unforgiving and opportunistic Northern side were quick to the breakdown and quicker on the counterattack.

Two quick strikes for goals by NoLa in the first five minutes put the Rhinos on notice as NoLa jumped out to a 14 lead at six minutes: wing Mauricio Urrutia put wing Alex Philpott into space at Fresno's ten meter line, and Philpott streaked up touch forty meters for the try converted by Urrutia and 7-0 to NoLa; they upped their lead as #8 Jarrod Falcon twisted and sliced 20 meters through the Rhinos' defense to dot down in the corner, Urrutia conversion.

Urrutia increased NoLa's lead to 17 with a penalty goal at minute 14. Then Fresno came alive, counterattacking well NoLa's territorial kicking game and bringing action into NoLa's half of the field before handling errors undid ground gained and errant kicking stymied the offense.

With Fresno on the attack at NoLa's 10 meter line, a looping boot the Fresno wing was gathered smartly by Urrutia who returned it 60 meters for his own conversion and 27-0 with time waning in the half. Fresno brought play into NoLa territory and hard yards gained by their forwards paid off as John Richardson dotted down for a midpoint tally of 27-5.

A pair of Urrutia penalty goals just after re-start brought the scoreline to 33-5. With the Rhinos at NoLa's door, flyhalf Malei Puono snatched ball from the breakdown three meters from goal and dove across to touch down and bring the score to 33-10.

Philpott finished out the scoring for NoLa, and Walt Pickerell dotted the final for Fresno with Adam Wells adding the conversion: final Northern Louisiana 38 – Fresno Rhinos 17.

Northern Louisiana 38
Tries: Philpott (2), Falcon, Urrutia
Convs: Urrutia (3); Pen: Urrutia (4)

Fresno 17
Tries: Richardson, Puono, Pickrell
Convs: Wells

Referee: M. Nelson