The summer 7s season is barely upon us and it's not always easy to gauge which teams will challenge for a national title.

But defending national champs Old Puget Sound Beach are expected to be contenders once more. The club featured Fili Botitu and Isi Daveta, two fast and dangerous backs, along with a group of intelligent and hardworking players such as Mike Nelson, Pat Curtis and Nolan Allen. In addition, of course, they made a national team player of Nu'u Punimata.

But this year OPSB has added some more talent and got some others back from injury just in time. Punimata, who suffered a leg injury playing for the USA 7s team in Las Vegas, is back and played for the OPSB team in the Buccaneer 7s in Esquimalt, BC, where they won the Plate.

In addition, Daveta, who missed almost the entire Super League season, is back from injury and also played in BC this weekend. Alipate Tuilevuka is with the team, having joined the club in the fall, as is former Fijian international William Rasileka. They will be augmented by an expected summer influx of Central Washington University players, including (possibly) Kellen Gordon, Patrick Blair, and Aaron Lee.

This past weekend, OPSB took half their squad to Canada, under the watchful eye of coach Waisale Serevi, and half their squad to Washington's state capitol under Evan Haigh to play in

the Tatunka 7s.

They won the Tatunka easily, although Haigh blew out his knee and will be out for the summer.

“With the talent we have it’s not the end of the world that I got injured,” said a philosophical Haigh. “What’s important is that we don’t have many more injuries.”

Haigh said the club is trying to get as much playing time as possible for all players, mixing up the squads and playing multiple tournaments on a day.

“The Seattle Rovers played hard and are an improved team,” said Haigh. “It was a fun tournament for us. But if we play only in the Northwest we end up playing the same teams in the same competitions. And if we just put out one team and have the same players playing, then other players don’t think they have a shot and we don’t get better. This way, every player gets to compete at a good level, and they feel they have a shot. This weekend was a great way to start the year.”

With the lineup they have, OPSB looks strong, and that’s before USA player Miles Craigwell joins the squad, which he will this coming week. But Haigh said the young college players are also a huge part of the club’s effort.

“The key thing for us each week as that we’re learning and playing consistently and playing together,” he said. “And the future outlooks is always part of our plans.”