Exiles with ball. Dobson Images

Atlanta Old White in black. Dobson Images

Middlesex ballcarrier looking for support. Dobson Images

The Woodlands Exiles traveled to San Francisco with just nine players, having to leave several at home because of eligibility considerations. They knew they could win their pool, but fatigue was the x-factor.

As it turned out, the Exiles did win their pool, and fatigue was evident.

The Houston club overpowered Pittsburgh 19-5 in their opener and Middlesex 22-5 in the second game. Atlanta Old White, who was pounded 33-7 by Middlesex earlier in the day, proved to be a much tougher out, and the Exiles played them to a 24-24 draw in their day-one finale.

However, tell Exiles captain Phil Mack the tie with Old White was due to being tired, and he'll disagree.

“I don’t think so,” he said. “You’re only allowed to make three subs a game anyway. I think at the end of the day, if you’re have the right nine guys, its as good as 12.”

Is playing shorthanded a motivating factor?

“I think so, but this is the National Championships,” he said. “There’s not a lot of motivation needed. We put in a lot of work this summer, and we’re just happy to be here.”

Old White, because of that poor first match, was playing for their tournament lives against the Exiles. The South champs came out completely flat against the Savages, and they never got into the game, in which Middlesex captain Jared Collinson excelled, putting in two momentum-securing tries.

Atlanta’s second match, against Pittsburgh, was a stark difference. They scored early and often pouring 38 points on Pittsburgh, 31 of which came in the first half. Had Old White pulled out a victory over the Exiles, they would have forced a three-way logjam atop the pool, but the tie left them 1-1-1 and on the outside looking in.

The Exiles draw Youngbloodz in their quarterfinal, while Middlesex faces MARFU champ Schuylkill River.

Pool scores
Exiles 19-5 Pittsburgh
Middlesex 33-7 Atlanta
Exiles 22-5 Middlesex
Atlanta 38-7 Pittsburgh
Middlesex 17-7 Pittsburgh
Exiles 24-24 Atlanta