In the Northwest Collegiate Rugby Conference (NCRC), 7s season started strong with the Oregon State Invitational last weekend. The next step, the inaugural Palouse Open 7s tournament in Pullman, Wash. this weekend as the final warm-up before the NCRC 7s in Seattle later this month.

Looking like their normal dominant selves were the Central Washington Wildcats who posted an undefeated record (4-0) and outscored opponents a whopping 165 points to zero. That feat all on a total of 14 cancelled practices due to the wildfires in the Wenatchee, WA area.

Fast forward to this weekend and while the venue is different, league Commissioner Matt Hudson expects some of the same things from Oregon.

“Until anyone proves otherwise, CWU is the team to beat this year,” Hudson told RUGBYMag.com. “They are athletic and coached by the College All Americans 7s coach (Tony Pacheco). They are athletic and make very few mistakes.”

Hudson did mention he likes what he sees from the improvement in programs from last year’s NCRC 7s tournament. “OSU looks to have taken a big step forward and looking forward to seeing if Western Washington is as strong as they were at the tournament last year.”

The Vikings went on to play CWU in the NCRC 7s final last season.

Also on the horizon in the NCRC are teams like Eastern Washington who always puts together an athletic team and Western Oregon who looked strong, but very raw in their 7s debut in Oregon. One pick as the dark house of the conference is University of British Columbia-Okanagon, a fairly new varsity team out of Canada.

“They are fairly new to being varsity in that they are a varsity 7s team only, so I’m very interested to see how they do this weekend,” Hudson said.

As for Washington State, Coach Nolan Allen feels his team has a lot to prove to others and mainly themselves for being competitive again in this league.

“I feel that WSU has taken a step back behind both Oregon State and Western Oregon in terms of challenging Central Washington for the league title,” Allen said. “OSU is one of the clear challengers and WOU has a lot of island talent and look pretty good this year.”