

Men's 7s Nationals Pool by Pool Breakdown

Written by Alex Goff & Pat Clifton
Wednesday, 28 November 2012 11:27



The RUGBYMag crew attacks every pool, predicting the records of each team. Scroll to the bottom of the article to see who the Ruggamatrix America team tabbed to win it all. More in depth previews available for premier subscribers.

POOL A

Alex:

I think you'd have to be nuts not to pick Life to win it. I know they are missing Cam Dolan, and that's a shame as he could be the best big man in the tournament, aside from Air Force's Jack Bristol, but they have a ton of weapons and they've proven over the past 13 months or so that they can play 7s.

The battle here is for 2nd, and I have a feeling that even second place won't be enough to make the Cup Round as there will be a tiebreaker, probably points difference, and I'd expect all three teams in Pool A to be beaten handily by Life. I think Colorado State is good, but so is Wisconsin. That's the game, as Pat pointed out in his preview, that will decide 2nd.

Pat: Right, Life is the clear favorite. But remember they struggled in the pool rounds at last year's Nationals and narrowly escaped Penn State in the opening game of the CRC via the "Miller minute". Had that game been played under regular 7s rules, the Nittany Lions would have scored the upset. And Wisconsin has established itself as better than Penn State. So there is some potential for an upset of Life.

I actually think Colorado State has a good shot at winning second in this pool, and if you

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consider that Pool F's #2 is highly unlikely to get into the Cup rounds based on point differential, as is Pool D's, then all of a sudden, whoever finishes second in A has a 50/50 shot.

Alex: Yeah that's a good point. Life IS a favorite. Does that mean they can be shaken in the opening minutes? Yeah it does. Of course, they open against Northeastern, so ...

Predicted Records:

Life: **3-0; 3-0**

Wisconsin: **2-1; 1-2**

Colorado State: **1-2; 2-1**

Northeastern: **0-3; 0-3**

POOL B

Pat: Cal has been playing great all fall after committing themselves to the concept of a 7s season. And I think Seamus Kelly would really like to prove a point, that he can excel 7s, too, and the team as a whole would like to prove they can excel at 7s, and Cal has gone a while without winning a National Championship, so they won't be short on desire.

But, Arkansas State is my favorite to win the whole enchilada. I like their individual athleticism, their makeup of fast guys, steppers, big bodies and high-effort guys, and I really like their depth. Wouldn't be shocked to see Cal and Arkansas State in a rematch in the Cup knockout rounds, but I think the Red Wolves go undefeated in Pool B. And don't be shocked if Middlebury snipes NC State.

Alex: Really? Middlebury over NC State?

Pat: Yeah. They are putting a HS 7s All American on the pitch for the first time all season in and Brian Sirkia can play. NC State has shown some inconsistency -- they beat teams they maybe shouldn't, and they lose to teams they maybe shouldn't.

Alex: Sirkia's great, true. I like NC State's teamwork. I like Cal and I guess I'd go with Cal here, but I could see ASU beating them. Cal lost to the other ASU, Arizona State, at the Pac 12 tournament, so they can be beaten. And, actually, I think Cal is still finding its way a bit. But I will

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pick Cal -- I think they have some height, which apparently is something I'm fixated on for this tournament ... but Redwolves could win the whole thing.

Predicted Records

Cal: **3-0**; **2-1**

Arkansas State: **2-1**; **3-0**

NC State: **1-2**; **1-2**

Middlebury: **0-3**; **0-3**

POOL C

Alex: Pool C is another wild one don't you think?

Pat: Indeed. Kutztown and Central Washington meet again. They played in the semis last year and in the final of the first-ever CRC qualifier at Sam Boyd Stadium in Las Vegas. These teams only seem to meet when there's a lot at stake. As for Virginia and Texas, no one expects anything from either team, and that makes them dangerous.

Alex: I think Kutztown has Central in their sites, and I think that could be a detriment. Kutztown is a terrific 7s team, possibly the best in the country, but if they get fixated on passing the Wildcats, they won't.

Pat: I think you can't underestimate the loss of Tim Stanfill. True burners are at a premium in every level of 7s, and especially at the college level. It's what has separated CWU and KU in the past, and I don't know that Central has that finisher anymore.

Alex: Maybe so - perhaps Kutztown gets them on speed. CWU has power up front and really, really good teamwork. I am a big Patrick Blair fan and Tanner Barnes was outstanding as a freshman. These guys are solid.

I also think Virginia and Texas are good enough to pull off an upset, but I look at all the scenarios and most of them point to Central Washington winning this pool.

Pat: Hard not to be a Blair fan. But can he stay healthy and at top condition throughout the

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ourney? Can Tim Acker? I've seen both guys wear down or get injured over the course of a tournament. And that could be the difference. But I will take Kutztown, as they have added talent where Central has lost some.

Predicted Records

Central Washington: **3-0; 2-1**

Kutztown: **2-1; 3-0**

Texas: **1-2; 0-3**

Virginia: **1-2; 1-2**

POOL D

Pat: I think this is a pool of unknowns a bit with Dartmouth and Air Force. We know Dartmouth lost a bunch of really good players and a great coach and still managed to win the Ivy League. We know Air Force should be fit and has Bristol and has racked up some wins this fall. But we also know that Dartmouth added a great coach and that Madison Hughes is really good. And we know Air Force hasn't done so well at any of the big national tournaments they've played in, whether it was this event last year or the LVI.

So setting expectations for these teams seems a bit like a crap shoot.

Alex: I like Air Force a lot, and I think they've been training 7s more than anything else this year. I also like Dartmouth, They won two CRCs in a row, the second after losing the co MVPs, a football stud and their fastest player (four different guys). But also they won the second CRC because they had a lot of carryover from last time. This fall? I still see carryover, and more than any other team, they've been successful at crossing over football and lacrosse athletes.

Hughes is not everything for them. If he is, they're in trouble.

I like Navy but I just haven't seen the results and I haven't seen the pattern of play they need.

The team you need to be worried about it Cal Poly. They'll mess you up.

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Pat: The Mustangs have been the 7s bridesmaid for two years now. They play well in Vegas, at California 7s, at St. Mary's, in Nationals last year and everywhere they play, but just not well enough for long enough to win an actual tournament. These guys were a very difficult conversion slotted by Colton Cariaga away from keeping Life out of the Cup Quarterfinals last year in College Station. They are very dangerous, and Landis Nasser is really good.

Alex: Yeah and their not winning a tournament is actually something that makes them hungrier

Predicted records

Dartmouth: **2-1**; **3-0**

Air Force: **2-1**; **1-2**

Cal Poly: **1-2**; **2-1**

Navy: **1-2**; **0-3**

POOL E

Alex: Speaking of hungry, St. Mary's is hungry

Pat: I feel like St. Mary's rode into Nationals last year as the favorite, and had it not been for Kingsley McGowan going down with an injury, they may have followed through. McGowan's out with a bad knee injury again this year, and Nick Wallace has been playing 15s and Andrew Cook is graduated, and I just don't think the Gaels are as deep as Life, Arkansas State, Cal, Kutztown and some of the other top dogs in this tournament. Kingsley is really fantastic, though, and he could have been the X factor that pushed them deep into the tourney.

Alex: The guy who is their finisher is Garrett Brewer ... you know, the guy with the hair. What is the X factor in my opinion for me is their group of forwards: Tim Maupin, Haley, Kelly Harris. They have some backs, but it's the forwards who will win this for them. I still like them, partly because I am not sold on the rest of the pool. But A&M, as you've said, keeps winning, and are at home. Nobody expects anything from Western Washington, and the Vikings are significantly improved from last year

Pat: Western was kind of the surprise of day one last year, and I don't think anyone is going to

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take them lightly this go round.

A&M plays a really clean pattern, has some guys who can tackle, who know what they're doing and are solid 7s players. And they have a game breaker in Connor Mills. But one isn't enough. If Brian Guillen, who is nursing a hamstring injury, can play close to 100%, then I like A&M to win this pool. He deserves 7s All American looks this year.

Predicted Records

St. Mary's: **3-0**; **2-1**

Texas A&M: **2-1**; **2-1**

Bowling Green: **0-2-1**; **2-1**

Western Washington: **0-2-1**; **0-3**

POOL F

Pat: I think we can agree the final pool is the toughest, can't we?

Alex: Yeah, this is a bear of a pool, and this is where being second stinks because only two second-place teams get to go into the Cup Round, and in a tight pool like this, a really good team is likely to be pushed out.

Pat: I wouldn't be knocked out of my chair if any one of these teams won it all. But, I would be blown away if Davenport doesn't make it to the Cup rounds, whether as the champion or one of the top two No. 2s. JP Eloff is too good to let that happen, and Davenport is too deep.

Alex: Can't depend on one player. I realize the Panthers aren't just one player, but remember that the California 7s qualifier had Cal Poly and St. Mary's and neither of those teams won it - San Diego State did. They played good team rugby, they've got good athletes, and Matt Hawkins, even if he's in Dubai, has these guys ready.

Pat: Lindenwood may have the best overall talent in this pool, but I'm not sold on them as a 7s team, which is why I think they finish last. Delaware is nothing if not a team, and they have a variety of talent -- tall guys, fast guys, shifty guys. They also play with a chip on their shoulder,

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just like SDSU.

Alex: You're right, Delaware is a good, cohesive team. Lindenwood is a compilation of very good rugby players who play well together, but on a program that is meh about 7s. Will that show up on the field? I think so.

Predicted Records

San Diego State: **2-1**; **2-1**

Davenport: **1-1-1**; **2-1**

Delaware: **1-1-1**; **2-1**

Lindenwood: **1-2**; **0-3**

National Champions, as predicted on Ruggamatrix America

Alex: Cal

Pat: Arkansas State

Bruce: Life