

USA Confirmed in Pacific Cup

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The International Rugby Board has finally confirmed changes to the IRB Pacific Nations Cup with an expanded schedule and inclusion of new teams confirmed for 2013.

The IRB has confirmed that Canada and USA will join the popular IRB-funded tournament on a permanent basis, joining Fiji, Japan and Tonga in the 2013 competition.



2013 Pacific Nations Cup Schedule

Saturday, May 25

Japan v Tonga Japan
Canada v USA Canada

Saturday, June 1

Fiji v Japan Fiji

Wednesday, June 5

Fiji v Canada Canada

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Saturday, June 8

Canada v Tonga Canada

Saturday, June 15

USA v Tonga USA

Wednesday, June 19

Japan v Canada Japan

Fiji v USA Japan

Sunday, June 23

Japan v USA Japan

Tonga v Fiji Japan

The new-look competition, will be played between May 25 and June 23 and will see matches hosted in Canada, Fiji, Japan and USA. Japan will host the finale to the IRB Pacific Nations Cup 2013 with doubleheaders on the final two match days as excitement continues to build ahead of the nation's hosting of Rugby World Cup 2019.

Reigning champions Samoa take a sabbatical from the IRB Pacific Nations Cup in 2013 to play in a quadrangular competition in South Africa in June against the Springboks, Scotland and Italy, having earned their spot as the highest-ranked Tier Two Union in 2012.

IRB Chairman Bernard Lapasset said: "This exciting enhancement to the IRB Pacific Nations Cup is good news for Japan, Canada, USA and the Pacific Islands. We now have in place an annual high-calibre competition that will deliver compelling matches, while also fulfilling the high performance needs of our Unions. I am sure it will capture hearts and minds in the Pacific Islands and North America."

IRB Head of Development and Performance Mark Egan added: "The IRB has a long-term

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commitment through our strategic plan to create greater levels of quality Test competition for Tier Two nations in order to boost the competitiveness of the world Game and Rugby World Cup. To that end we are investing more than £10 million per annum in tournaments and high performance programmes for our targeted group of Strategic Initiative Unions."

"The inclusion of Canada and USA in a new-look IRB Pacific Nations Cup is a key outcome of continued consultation with our Unions to deliver a schedule that suits their high performance programs. It also provides an opportunity to benchmark performances two years out from Rugby World Cup 2015 in England."

The announcement follows an unprecedented November 2012 competition schedule for Tier Two Unions, which saw 15 nations in action, the highly-successful introduction of the IRB International Rugby Series and notable performances from Samoa, Tonga and Japan in Europe.

USA Rugby Chief Executive Nigel Melville said: "USA Rugby is delighted to be given the opportunity to compete in the IRB Pacific Nations Cup. It has been a pleasure working with all the participating Unions and we are now looking forward to playing against them on the field. The new look PNC will provide the Eagles with consistent fixtures against some very competitive teams, this can only be good news for the Eagles as we plan our path to Rugby World Cup 2015 in England."

Canada Rugby Chief Executive Graham Brown added: "This is a fantastic opportunity for Canada to play quality matches to help us build our high performance programme. We are grateful to the IRB for their support of this initiative and excited about hosting a number of games in Canada in 2013."

For Japan, hosting the climax to the 2013 competition alongside two inbound Tests against Wales represents a further boost for the profile of Rugby as the nation prepares to host Asia's first Rugby World Cup.

Japan head coach Eddie Jones said: "The IRB Pacific Nations Cup is a wonderful opportunity for Japan and all participating Unions to elevate their performances to a higher level in order that we can be more competitive at future Rugby World Cups. Combined with playing two Tests

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against Wales in June, the PNC provides us with a strong competition calendar. The physical nature of Canada and USA plus the Pacific flair of Fiji and Tonga will make for a compelling tournament and we are very excited to be participating."