Since 2006 the USA and Canada have played six times, with Canada winning five of them.

In fact, they've won those five all in fairly dominating fashion.

Take away the USA's 12-6 victory on the 4th of July, 2009, Canada can boast five victories with an average score of 42-14.

With that kind of record, you have to figure there's no chance the Eagles can pull out a win on hostile ground.

Except … it is possible. The USA has, in the last 16 years, beaten Canada in Canada four times. 1995 in Markham, Ont., 1999 in Markham again, 2003 in Vancouver, and 2005 in Edmonton.

That's the good news. That bad news is, the total winning margin for those four games is eight points. That's right, eight. Three games won by a single point, and one (2003 in Vancouver) by five points.

There’s a message there somewhere.

Now let’s look at the period when the USA was stronger against Canada. That would be the period 2003-2005. During that time the two countries played each other six times, splitting them 3-3. All but one of those games were within a try. The one that wasn’t was 2003 in Buenos Aires, when the Eagles won somewhat comfortably 35-20.

There’s a message there, too.

And then we return to the last time the USA beat Canada, which was in 2009 when the Eagles won 12-6 in Charleston SC. That was followed by a disaster of a first half (for the USA, anyway) in the follow-up in Edmonton, a game where it’s easy to forget that the USA outscored Canada 18-17 in the second half.

Now, following the first year ever when the two nations didn’t play each other, we get to see whether we really have returned to the times when this matchup was a complete tossup.

I think it could be, and here’s why:

Every USA team that has won in Canada has done so generally because they have battled, they have toughed it out. They are usually teams that have a singularity of purpose – so much so that they’ve been able to overcome some big obstacles (in 2003, starting flyhalf Mike Hercus was injured. The Eagles started Cayo Nicolau, and still won).

These teams have also been very patriotic teams. Teams that have bought into some form of inner power.

The current national team is on the cusp of being an angry, unified, passionate group of rugby

players. Going to battle on hostile ground in front of a hostile crowd could be just the tonic they need.

And one more thing. The last time these two teams played, the presentation of the American National Anthem was messed up. Rugby Canada's mistake threw the Americans off their game. If it happens this time, or if the music plays properly, either way, you get the feeling the players will remember.

So to the players. Both teams have made selection decisions that indicate this will be a hard-nosed clash.

First off there's Canadian lock Jamie Cudmore. At 32, Cudmore has not always been a regular on his national team. But he is a very specific type of player. He is an intimidator. He gets in trouble; he gets in fights; he sets a tone.

On the US side there's no one really like Cudmore, but Head Coach Eddie O'Sullivan has made some selection choices that indicate he expects a bit of a war out there. There's Nic Johnson, who is the biggest, grouchiest of the USA's loose forwards. He is partnered with Lou Stanfill and Todd Clever on a back row that won't take any backward step.

In the backs, Canada will look for success through teamwork. They have had more time to hone their timing than the USA, and will want that to work for them.

Everyone knows Canada will defend well, but if the Eagles defense is strong, too, then other aspects of play kick in. In such close games, turnovers make the difference.

When the Eagles keep the ball, are patient, and control Canadian counter-attacks, then they can win. Too often they don't do that, and the game blows up in their face.

This time, I think the USA forwards will stand up to Canada up front, and will hold the line

defensively. If they do that, the game will be close.

But a USA win? Four close away victories isn't enough to be so confident as a USA win. Here's what I can say, though: This will be the closes game the USA has played in Canada in six years.