Written by Alex Goff
Monday, 11 February 2013 16:12

In professional and international sports, athletes make mistakes; often very publicly.

It's part of the game, and getting called out for those mistakes is also part of the game. There are some athletes who rarely make mistakes. Look at Matt Hawkins, at least on a disciplinary level he has been exemplary. Yellow–carded for a tip tackle, he was told in the citing meeting at the USA 7s that it should have been a red card and a four- to six-week ban.

(Some observers held a less outraged view of what seemed to be a fairly conventional tackle.)

But Hawkins, despite being one of the most experienced 7s players in USA history, had never been yellow carded before. His disciplinary record was taken into account, and he received a one-game ban on Saturday.

Other players make mistakes, because the way they play, or what they are asked to do, is high-risk, and high-reward.

So we come to Luke Hume. An electric player, an intense player, and sometimes a rash player. Rashness is not a bad thing. Sunday against Canada Hume opted to take a conversion in front of the posts. Why did he take it rather than the regular kicker, Folau Niua? Because Niua was 40 meters away, and reportedly signaled to Hume to go ahead and take it. Hume did so, and missed badly.

He rushed it, perhaps thinking there wasn't much time left.

OK, that's a mistake, but remember that Hume had been coming on as a sub this past weekend in Las Vegas and was making an impact. His try closed the gap against Fiji, and his try – when he dove with his body across the touchline and his hand (and the ball) in play – at the end set up a chance to tie the game.

Against Canada he also set up attacks in the USA comeback. He does that – he shakes teams up.

Yeah, he blew it. But ask each player how many tackles he missed (against Canada, the USA missed nine tackles, Canada three). Ask each player about a dropped ball or a poor pass or a turnover in the ruck. The Eagles lost to Fiji because they got rucked off the ball twice, not because Hume scored in the corner as opposed to under the sticks. All other things being equal, the USA would have beaten Canada had that conversion gone over, true, but is their failure to secure the kickoff in overtime, or the five penalties conceded any less important?

Seems to me, though, if you're going to be kicking conversions in a World Series tournament, you should be practicing drop kicks. With the residency program in full swing, at least half the team should be practicing kicks. Because some day, USA v Canada could happen again.