

Chileans Dazzle At New York Sevens

By Sally Williamson

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NEW YORK, N.Y. —With temperatures in the mid-thirties, nearly 80 teams from the US and abroad competed in the largest sevens tournament in the United States. Teams competed in one of the four divisions—College, Social, Women, and Club—in New York Rugby Club's traditional Thanksgiving Sevens Tournament. After a frosty eight hours, the Chilean National Team dazzled the crowd with a 58-0 victory over Old Blue in an amazing Club final; New York topped Ormstown 36-0 for the Women's Championship; Colorado State notched a 22-19 victory over North Carolina in the Collegiate final; and Vail beat the Canadian Ex-Cons 26-12 to take the Social title.

Club Division

Out of the 22 teams in the highly competitive club division, the four expected to perform well made it to the semifinals: Atlantis, Old Blue (which squeaked by a Northeast select-side), heavily favored Waverly and the Chilean national team.

From early on, Waverly and Chile, the two teams that traveled the farthest (Waverly, from near Sydney, Australia; Chile, from Santiago), sparked the most intrigue. In their first game, Waverly established its strength by trouncing London-St. George, 61-0.



New York (right) packs down against Ormstown in the Women's final.

Chile demonstrated its speed and elusiveness by topping an experienced Princeton Athletic Club 50-0. Although Atlantis and Old Blue eliminated teams like Newport and the NRU Selects, respectively, their margins of victory were much smaller than those of Waverly or Chile.

It wasn't until their semifinal against Waverly that the Chileans had any real opposition. The big Australian team with deceptive speed limited the lean, bullet-like Chileans to a 14-0 win. In the other semifinal Old Blue topped Atlantis 26-12.

Chile's landslide, 58-0 victory in the final does not give an accurate assessment of its opponent, Old Blue - one of the better 7s teams in the nation - but provided an opportunity to see sevens played at a higher level and with better athletes than most in the crowd had ever seen. With their combination of speed, support, patience, and ability to read the field, Chile played impeccable sevens and was far superior to any team in the tournament. There wasn't one shining star, main runner, or primary scorer, but an entire team of them. There was Cristóbal Berti, the near perfect kicker who scored several tries and made nearly all the conversions; Roberto Infante, the Rugby Imports MVP, who had numerous assists, three 40 - 50 meter runs and at least two tries to his credit; and Rodrigo Acevedo and Nicolas Arancibia, who were gap-seeking missiles who could run at tremendous speed, pause for a nanosecond to read the field, then pivot around oncoming defenders.

Their beautifully choreographed passing was not the hot-dogging of the Social sides, but efficient, instinctive, intelligent use of the ball. This clearly manifested difference set the Chileans apart

from the rest of the field. According to the Chilean coach, Elías Santillan, “For them [North American teams], it is their power. Our style is technique—to focus on technique, skills and patience.”

Women’s Division

In the twelve team Women’s Division, New York took on the Town of Mt. Royale (TMR, Montreal) in one semifinal, while the Toronto Barbarians faced Ormstown.

Although the final featured a fine display of sevens skills, the semifinal between New York and TMR was the women’s game to watch. New York began with a try from the opening kickoff by captain and Eagle Hedwig Aerts and went into the half with a 17 –0 lead. But, as New York scrumhalf Tracey Cushing noted, TMR would not be easily beaten. “TMR, was one of the few teams playing true sevens. . . .They spread the ball well and were patient with their offense.” It was this patience, combined with their speed and agility, that kicked in during the second half, as two long runs and some missed tackles by New York gave TMR a 19-17 lead with only a minute left in the match. Beautiful switches between the unstoppable Aerts, Maureen Conroy and Rugby Imports MVP Keenya Warner, led to a five-person pass phase and 50-meter break by Lara Vivolo. This set up the winning try by New York’s Sarah Davidson and a berth in the championship match.

Flying off this momentum, New York went on to the defeat Ormstown in the final 36-0.

Collegiate Division

The 16-team Collegiate Division narrowed to Stern (NYU Business School) versus North Carolina and Rutgers versus Colorado State in the semifinals.

UNC, probably the most entertaining team in the tournament with their leap-frog lineouts, enthusiastic B Side support and leadership of Scottish Captain Craig MacDonald, made it to the final with a 19-7 win over Stern.

Out of a bracket that included early favorites Holy Cross and Southern Connecticut, Colorado State posted a 19-7 semifinal win over Rutgers University.

The College Division final between the North Carolina Tar Heels and Rams of Colorado State was not decided until the final moments. An amazing sliding try in the second half put CSU on top until UNC retook the lead via a 50+ yard try by Tom Scheinzbach. However, the Tar Heel cheers were silenced when Colorado State’s Nathan Devlin found a gap and slipped by two tackles for the game-winning try, 22-19.

The Rugby Imports MVP was CSU’s Cody Van Horn.

Social Division

At a tournament that prides itself with providing the opportunity for players from different clubs to form teams, the Social Division is the heart and soul of the New York 7s.

Out of the 24-team bracket, Vail easily won its pool and quarterfinal against Wilkes Barre 33-5. They then topped the SOBs (Southern Connecticut Old Boys) 24-7 in a semifinal that started without a referee. The Ex-Cons, alumni from Concordia University in Canada, emerged from their pool with victories over the FBI and Boozehounds. One of the closest games of the entire tournament came from this division as the Ex-Cons posted a 24-23 victory over the Angry Elephants.

But the Ex-Cons adrenaline would not be enough against a well-practiced and speedy Vail team that emerged victorious, 26-12.
The Rugby Imports MVP was Vail's David Brae.

Acknowledgments

Marking the end of the fall rugby season, the New York Sevens has been held on the Saturday following Thanksgiving every year since 1959. Budweiser sponsored this year's tournament and Poland Springs donated water. Rugby Imports sponsored the MVP awards and each division winner received Knock Out poly jerseys sponsored by Balls Out Rugby and the NYRFC.

If you have interest in next year's tournament, check out www.newyorkrugby.com or write rugbyinfo@newyorkrugby.com.