

Seoul Sisters build friendships in Japan

(IRB.COM) Tuesday 30 June 2009
By Zilia Papp
From Tokyo



Keiko Kato moves the ball for a combined Japanese side against the Seoul Sisters of Korea in the first women's club rugby game between the two nations - Photo: Benjamin Min

There is a fine line between friendship and rivalry and, for now, South Korea's only women's rugby team is on the friendly side of the line with its Japanese counterparts.

Making their first trip to Japan, the *Seoul Sisters* lost 44-10 to a Japanese squad at Tatsumino Mori Rugby Ground in Tokyo on Sunday in the first club-level rugby match between teams from the two countries.

Not only was the match the birth of a friendship between the two squads, it may also have christened a rivalry that will one day grow into something really special.

"It is our first time in Japan, but Japan and Korea are so close to each other it is important for both sides to maintain a strong relationship," said Seoul Sisters President Amanda Joyce.

"We put on a strong show for the Japanese team, we hit them hard and we really worked to shut down their fast play."

The victors, inspired by MVP Naoko Hasabe's hat trick of tries and two successful conversions, were cobbled together from different sources with the team on Sunday combining players from the Setagaya Ladies, Phoenix and Japan's only collegiate women's rugby team, Nippon Sports Science University.

In addition to Hasabe's effort, Japan national team player Marie Yamaguchi contributed a brace, while Rie Nakayama, Suzuki Ikumi and Chika Sasaki also

crossed for one try apiece. Japan's game plan of spreading the ball wide proved to be a great success.

The Koreans utilised their physical superiority in the first half, scrum half Mary McNeil touching down with the ball from a rolling maul, closely followed with a try by wing Lola Jemibewon, although McNeil missed both conversions.

Learning valuable lessons

According to former Canada captain Kelly McCallum, who was assistant coach during Japan's preparations for Rugby World Cup Sevens 2009 and coached the Japanese side on Sunday, the match also provided practical benefits.

"It was good to play against a more physical side, it helps to train for the Asian qualifiers for the 2010 Women's World Cup," said McCallum, who captained Canada on home soil at the last Women's RWC in 2006.

"At the qualifiers you have to know how to play against a more physical side, to change some of the tactics they use in the Japanese league against similar sized girls, which won't work against a bigger side. It was a really good experience for both sides."

While they were debutants in Japan, it is not the first time the *Seoul Sisters* have sought involvement in Asia's women's rugby scene.

Dankook University professor Natalie Hallemans, who has also been capped for Korea, established the club in 2005 and since then it has actively contributed to the development of the Korean national women's team.

Given the relatively small number of female players in Asia, experienced expatriate members of the *Sisters* have been instrumental in organising tours and matches for national and club teams in the region.

The team toured China in 2007, played games against the Hong Kong national team home and away in 2006 and 2007 respectively and participated in the Guam Rugby International Tournament, where they claimed first place in 2007. They also join the annual Korean Yeong Wol Sevens tournament domestically.

USA announces first women's Sevens league

The USA has announced the introduction of new women's Sevens league aiming to continue the growth of the sport, and the women's game there.

The city-based league will initially work on a four-team tournament format - Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington DC are guaranteed teams and coaching staff - prefaced by regional team practices, but Albany, Columbia, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco and Denver have all also expressed interest.

"When we announced the league there was a lot of positive excitement from players, administrators and coaches," said USA women's Sevens coach Sue Parker.

"It's unlikely that we'll have a West Coast league this year, at least not a formal one, but I don't want to discourage people from contacting us. If there's a team or coach out there that wants to identify elite athletes, we'll send them the coaching programme.

"The goal is to form a deep, athletic national player pool. If a current club team is willing to engage in that exercise and they have that level of athlete, we wouldn't discourage them from contacting us. But we're not here to support the recreational

league; it's not our design."

The league kicks off with trials on 11-12 July in each respective city followed by at least one practice from 14-16 July, a camp on 19 July and then the city-based league tournament at Friendship Field in Philadelphia. Players must sign up through the website, [**www.citybased7s.com**](http://www.citybased7s.com), to participate.

© IRB 2007 | |