

All Blacks: World 7s Champs

by Ed Hagerty

Sydney, Australia
March 22/23, 1986

In an historic event, which brought together national sevens teams from all corners of the globe, the All Blacks of New Zealand won the first ever World Sevens Title by crushing favored Australia, 32-0 in the Championship match. Expertly organized by the New South Wales Rugby Union to celebrate the opening of their new stadium at Concord Oval, the event attracted sixteen teams (Argentina, Australia, Canada, England, Fiji, France, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Tonga, U.S., Wales and Western Samoa) who delighted packed houses on both days (and over 30 million more via television) with their spectacular non-stop action.

The game of sevens owes its current international prominence to the efforts of the Hong Kong Rugby Union and their annual spring spectacular. Due to its exotic setting, superb organization and colorful field, the Hong Kong Sevens has become one of the most attractive events on the international rugby calendar. Nevertheless, in terms of competitive significance, the New South Wales Sevens has supplanted Hong Kong as the world's premier sevens event. Event organizer Ken Elphick insisted that all participants be the national representatives of countries with substantial rugby populations. Unlike Hong Kong, the organizers would not extend favored nation status to the Home Countries, allowing national level players from the United Kingdom to parade like wolves in sheep's clothing, under the banners of Crawshays Welsh, Public School Wanderers, Irish Wolfhounds or Scottish Co-Optimists, while all other countries were required to wear their national colors. Unlike Hong Kong, there were no weak "opponents" from Sing-



New Zealand's Wayne Shelford, with Frano Botica in support, attacks versus Australia in the final. (Photo-Hagerty)

apore, Brunei or Malaysia for sub-par national sides from the larger countries to build good won-lost records.

The gods smiled on rugby's first true World Championship in 163 years and provided brilliant sunshine with temperatures in the mid-80s on both days.

AUSTRALIA

Blazing speed, pinpoint passing and tough defense were ingredients for success in this event and Australia displayed all three in abundance as they swept undefeated through five preliminary matches.

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Format

The sixteen teams were divided into groups of four with each team playing every other team in its group and the top two advancing to the quarters.

In their pool matches Australia topped the Netherlands 18-0, crushed a disappointing England 24-6, and then won a fiercely contested match over Spain 18-10.

In the quarter finals Australia disposed of Western Samoa 14-4 on tries by Cox, Calcroft and Poidevin and a Michael Lynagh conversion.

Semi-Final

This set up a much anticipated semi-final against a very exciting Welsh side. Wales reached the semi-finals with pool victories over the U.S. (18-0), eventual champions New Zealand (18-12), and Tonga (18-12).

In the quarter finals they beat France 12-8.

In the semi-final, however, Wales came crashing back to earth, their only score coming on the seventh try by the tremendously exciting flyhalf, Jonathan Davies. The Welshmen wilted under Australia's pressure and the 90° heat; surrendering converted tries to Lynagh, Williams

and Ella (18-6).

Australia simply outran and outmuscled Wales in this game. Wallaby #8, Peter Lucas was particularly effective, laying on some bone-crushing hits.

In this match, the Australians also regularly violated one of the existing totems of the game — they kicked to touch for position deep in their opponent's zone and they played kick and chase when one of their speed boys was in a position to get the touch-down.

NEW ZEALAND Prelims

On the other side of the draw, New Zealand was considered one of the sleepers of the competition as this was the first time they had treated sevens as a fully competitive exercise. After their erratic pool play, however, many "experts" wrote them off as not a serious threat.

They started off well enough, however, with a 22-0 pasting of Tonga. But in their second match, the All Blacks fell victim to the brilliance of Wales' Jonathan Davies whose three tries sent New Zealand to an 18-12 defeat. The All Blacks, however, rebounded well against the United States, beating an American team which just couldn't get untracked, 28-0.

Quarter Finals

On Sunday, Rope and manager Bill Freeman made the right adjustments in the All Black machinery and the team responded by blanking the second-seeded Fijians 16-0. In this game, David Kirk scored two tries while Frano Botica added a try and two conversions.

The All Blacks had learned from their mistakes in the Wales game and had also added a note

of intimidation to their play. Whereas on Saturday they played 6 men up and a sweeper back, on Sunday the New Zealanders played a pressuring, man-to-man game with all seven men up, not allowing the flamboyant Fijians an opportunity to unleash one of their free-form attacks.

Improvement

Before the competition began, New Zealand Coach, Bryce Rope, confided that the All Blacks had been behind Australia and Fiji when his country began sending full national sides to the Hong Kong Sevens in 1983. Due to internal competitions and greater awareness of sevens by the national selection panel, he now felt that the All Blacks had improved rapidly and could enter the world championships on a par with the other leading teams.

Commenting on the type of players needed for the game, Rope said: "Pure speed at all positions is crucial in sevens, and this is the fastest team New Zealand has ever fielded."

"At least one of the three forwards must be a very good lineout jumper. The scrum half is the vital key, while the fly half must have the ability to sum up the game like Mark Ella. The center and wing must have plenty of gas in the tank."

Rope added: "I've spent hours watching videos of Australia's sevens team to see the type of player needed for this game."

Semi-Finals

In the semi-final, New Zealand came face to face with the Pumas of Argentina, the slickest ball handlers in the competition. It was good to see Argentina back in the international sevens arena

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after their exclusion from the Hong Kong Sevens due to the Falklands War. (So much for the separation of sport and politics).

Argentina earned a spot in the semi-finals by virtue of pool victories over Japan (27-0), Western Samoa (18-0) and Romania (21-4), plus a quarter final win over the fiery Spaniards (12-6).

After the All Blacks comprehensive win over Fiji, there was an awareness among the rugby cognoscenti that the New Zealanders had shifted gears. No one was surprised, therefore, when they took the measure of Argentina by the score of 22-4.

Argentina's slick ball handling was nullified by the All Blacks' pressure defense, speed, size and fitness. All the Pumas could

Coach Bryce Rope said that the growing stature of sevens "will create a new era in New Zealand rugby."

Rope feels that sevens has had a tremendous influence on New Zealand's recent backline play in the 15-man game.

manage was a consolation try by Martin Yanguela late in the second half.

The All Black scoring came on tries by Frano Botica (2), Craig Green, Mike Clamp and three Botica conversions.

Final

So the final of rugby's first-ever World Sevens Championship came down to New Zealand versus Australia; countries which are the world's #1 and #2 ranked teams in the fifteen man game.

Although the All Blacks had improved game by game after their pool loss to Wales, "smart money" was still on Australia to take all the marbles. Australia, the defending Hong Kong Sevens Champ, was undefeated and they played sevens like chess; backing-up, going forward, working the ball, working the ball until an overload was created and then they'd virtually walk the ball in.

But New Zealand's size, strength, aggressiveness, fitness and speed caused Australia's game plan to come unglued.

The first thing I noticed while watching the game from the touchline was the size of the New Zealand forwards. Wayne Shelford, Zinزان Brooke and Mark Brook-Cowden were NFL linebacker size and with the same type of speed. These three dominated possession during the twenty minute final and their supremacy in the tight allowed

New Zealand's lightning-fast backs to run Australia off their feet.

The rout started in the third moment when Zin Brooke took a pass from Craig Green and out-sprinted Australian flyhalf Michael Lynagh in a 65-yard dash to the line (4-0).

Both men were also involved in the game's second try as an errant Lynagh pass went straight to the big All Black and Brooke ran it in from 25 yards out. Botica added the conversion and New Zealand lead 10-0.

Frano Botica closed out first half scoring in the eighth minute when he sped down the left touch line to score and then added the conversion (16-0).

During this first period Australia did spend some time in New Zealand's half of the field but they were never able to get an attack going and they didn't really come close to scoring.

Second Half

Things went from bad to worse after the restart. Fifty-six seconds into the half came the incident which had the Sydney newspapers buzzing for the next two days. On an upfield rush at about New Zealand's forty, Shelford, who was running the ball at full speed, caught Glen Ella, who was attempting to tackle him into touch, right on button with what the Sydney media described as "a fist or elbow to the jaw." From my perspective on the touchline, it looked like a good, old fashioned forearm shiver.

For Shelford's offense New Zealand was penalized, but Australia's Ella was knocked out of the game. This, it must be noted, was the competition's first real example of hard play, but it was not the last.

Less than a minute later, Shelford drew the attention of Simon Poidevin, the hard man of Australian rugby, and the two were brawling at midfield as Frano Botica went in for his second try (20-0).

Australia's Roger Gould left the field at this point due to a hamstring injury and the New Zealand cyclone continued unabated. Scrumhalf David Kirk kicked ahead and then regathered for the try which Botica converted (26-0).

Mike Clamp put the final nail in Australia's coffin when he outraced four Australians to touch down between the posts. Botica's conversion brought the final score to 32-0.

Frano Botica

Although all the New Zealanders played well, for me it was Botica who stood out. Besides directing the All Black attack and kicking the majority of their goals he, along with Jonathan Davies of Wales, shared the

tournament try scoring crown with seven apiece.

Bryce Rope

Following the game, coach Bryce Rope said that the growing stature of sevens "will create a new era in New Zealand rugby."

Rope feels that sevens has had a tremendous influence on New Zealand's recent backline play in the 15-man game. "I think it's a tremendous way to develop ball skills and get people thinking on their feet," said Rope.

He continued: "To win a championship like this against the top sixteen teams in the world is a great thing for the players. These players will look back on sevens and credit much of their improvement to their involvement in it."

"Sevens is being introduced to secondary schools back home and this victory can't help but make sevens grow. People back home will be watching the All Black victory on television for weeks and weeks to come."

Alan Jones

Australian Coach Alan Jones was gracious in defeat stating outright that: "New Zealand were too big, too fast and too strong for us. He felt that the Australian players were not as fit as they should have been at this time of the season and that they simply "ran out of gas."



France's Serge Blanco is considered by many to be the best rugby player in the world. His performance in Sydney enhanced that view. (Photo-Hagerty).



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Eagle Captain, Blane Warhurst, indicates his team's preference before taking the field against the All Blacks. The Eagles lost this contest 28-0. (Photo-Hagerty)

U.S. Goes 0-4 In Sydney

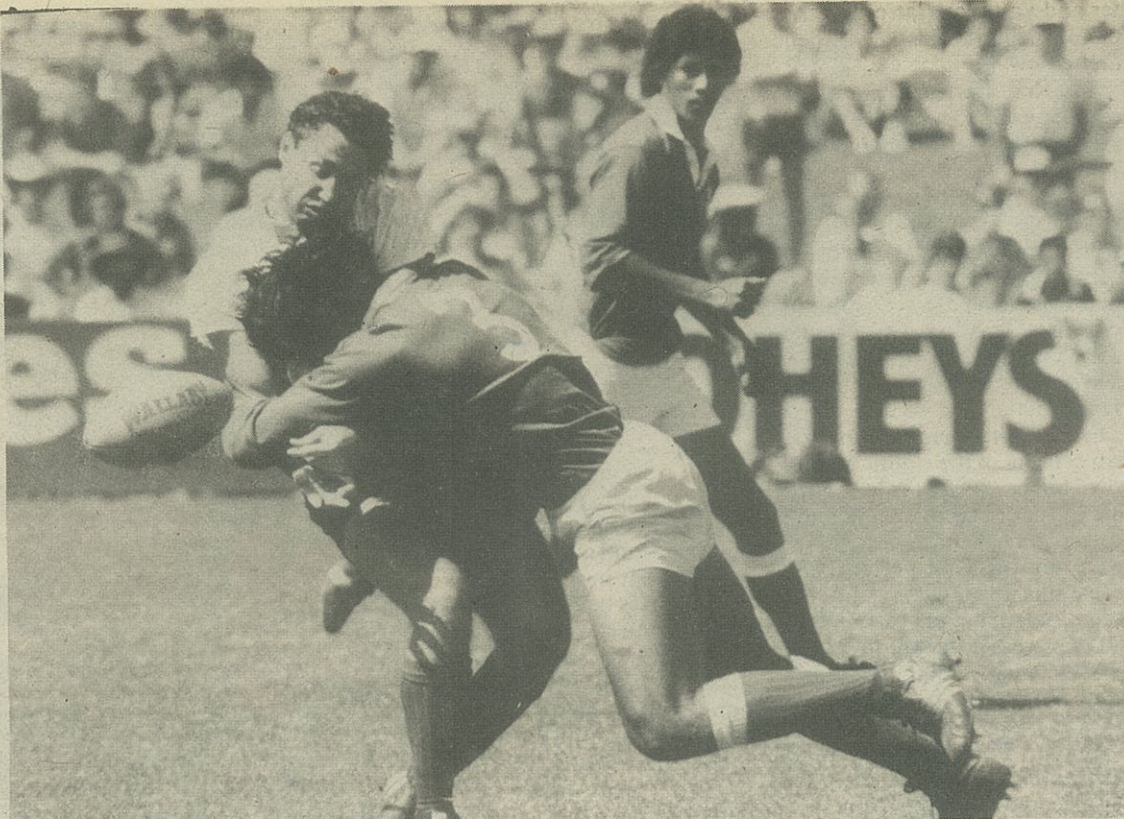
The performance of the United States at the World Sevens Championship was disappointing. The U.S. was eliminated after pool losses to Wales (18-0), Tonga (18-4) and New Zealand (28-0). When assessing America's performance, however, one must keep in mind that they were in what was unquestionably the toughest draw and that two of their losses came at the hands of the eventual champion (N.Z.) and a semi-finalist (Wales) who had beaten New Zealand in their pool match.

On Sunday, a match was arranged against Korea, and although the United States' performance was much improved, they lost this one as well, 16-14.

Selection

Following the National All Star Sevens Championship in Orlando this past December, the decision was made to select two U.S. Sevens sides. As the New South Wales Sevens was a new event and, therefore, an unknown quantity, the second side went to Sydney, while their first went to Hong Kong. In retrospect, considering the quality of the field in Sydney, this was a miscalculation. The most important lesson learned in Australia was that the talent pool of U.S. sevens players is not deep enough to support two teams.

Although inexperienced (of



Eagle forward Pete Deddah is flattened in the U.S.'s 18-4 loss to Tonga. (Photo-Hagerty)

the nine, only Titus and Warhurst had played at this level before), the U.S. side which went to Australia did not lack talent. This reporter had seen many of the U.S. players perform at the National Club and/or National All-Star Championships and felt that, if properly coordinated, they would be able to give a good account of themselves.

This view, however, was not shared by U.S. Sevens Coach Steve Gray, who was unhappy with selections and pessimistic about his team's chances; a view he made no effort to conceal.

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Wales 18, U. S. 0

In their first match against Wales the Eagles had early opportunities but weren't able to execute. The defense stood off too much and when they had possession, relinquished it by running into opposition.

It was in this match that the U.S. and the assembled multitude were introduced to new Welsh phenomenon, Jonathan Davies, who ran in two long

tries. Other Welsh scoring came on tries by Phillips and Moriarty and a conversion by Bleddyin Bowen.

U.S.	Wales
Deddah	Pickering
Warhurst	Phillips
Titus	Moriarty
Saunders	Jones
Caulder	Davies
Jenkinson	Bowen
Peluso	Brown

Tonga 18, U.S. 4

An 18-4 loss to Tonga was no disgrace. The Tongans have been playing rugby for many years, take it very seriously, and the country's best athletes are attracted to the game.

The game was a physical, hard-hitting affair in which the Tongans took advantage of their opportunities, while the U.S. couldn't. All three of the Tongan tries were scored by Peni Fakava and then converted by Alamoni Liavaa.

The U.S. played a very stilted game, showing little aggression, and going backwards much of the time. Their only score came late in the game when Jenkinson made a break from Tonga's 25 and passed to Brewington for the try. The conversion by Steve Gray was no good.

U.S.	Tonga
Deddah	Tupos
Warhurst	Langi
Titus	Fifita
Saunders	Liavaa
Gray	Eteari
Jenkinson	Fakava
Brewington	Taufa

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New Zealand 28, U.S. 0

In their third match the Eagles had the misfortune of facing a talented and determined All Black side who were intent on atoning for their loss to Wales and making their way into the quarter finals.

During the early going the Eagles seemed relaxed and were playing their best rugby of the competition. They were awarded a penalty twenty yards from New Zealand's line, directly between the posts, but instead of taking an almost sure three points (plus getting the ball back on the kick-off), they elected to run it.

The Eagle attack was snuffed out and the All Blacks' Wayne Sheldford scored on a length of the field movement thirty seconds later (4-0). Before half-time Terry Wright crossed the line and then converted his own try (10-0).

The All Blacks opened their account in the second half when Terry Wright laid down a nifty grub kick and then outraced the Eagle defenders to touch down. Wright's conversion was good (16-0).

Tournament MVP, Frano Botica, completed the All Blacks demolition job with two more tries, both of which he converted. This brought the final score line to 28-0.

U.S.	N.Z.
Deddah	Sheldford
Warhurst	Brooke
Titus	Brooke-Cowden
Parris	Kirk
Caulder	Botica
Peluso	Green
Jenkinson	Wright
	Warhurst

Commenting on the Eagles performance in Sydney, U.S. captain Blane Warhurst stated: "The best rugby athletes in the world were here and the U.S. isn't deep enough to send two different teams to Sydney and Hong Kong to compete effectively. The U.S. must get its best athletes on the field. We've got to get good, young players like Kevin Higgins and Gary Hein involved in sevens. We've got to get them over to events like this to show them what high level, international rugby is all about."

Deddah

When asked the difference between the rugby in Sydney and that which he had played in the States, Pete Deddah noted: "The intensity of the game and quality of the players here is much higher. The atmosphere was great, totally serious and totally devoted to rugby."

"The pace here is so much fas-

ter and you play flat out for the entire game. It requires a much higher level of fitness than we're used to in the States. Also, you just can't make mistakes. If you lose the ball, you may never get it back."

TOURNAMENT NOTES

I had gone to Sydney with the intent of recording the activities of the championship teams and the Eagles. But to ignore the incredible array of talent on display at events such as the New South Wales and Hong Kong Sevens, is unforgivable.

Sevens attracts rugby's stars, the fly boys, the headline makers. And the world's best were all on display over these two action packed days in Sydney. Anyone who has been to an international level sevens tournament, will never forget the thrill of seeing a world-class back get the ball on, an overlap, challenge his defender, pin back his ears and set sail for the line.

Players who made lasting impressions this weekend included Senevalati Laulau.

Laulau

The grand old man of Fijian rugby, 31-year-old Senevalati Laulau is an electrifying winger. His two tries against a talented French side demonstrated that he is still one of the best finishers in the game. His long fluid stride and incredible speed brought to mind a well-tuned Ferrari accelerating flat out past more conventional machinery.

Blanco

Another who fits in this category is France's multi-talented fullback Serge Blanco. Considered by many to be the most talented player in the game today, his attacking brilliance and long runs made him stand out above the crowd at Sydney.

Jonathan Davies

Those who saw Jonathan Davies play in Sydney now know why he is being compared to the legendary Welsh flyhalves, Barry John and Phil Bennett.

Tied for the try-scoring title with seven in five games, this 23-year-old from Neath has good speed, a tremendous sidestep and the knack for finding a hole in opposing defenses. Many feel he is about to launch a new era in Welsh rugby.

Spain

Perhaps the greatest success story in Sydney was that of Spain which posted an impressive and totally deserved 24-6 victory over fifth seeded England in their opening pool match. The Spaniards, who had never played sevens before, then moved into the quarter finals with a 12-6 victory over a very competitive Netherlands side. Forward Alberto Malo and playmaker Francisco Puertas, who scored



Jonathan Davies of Wales scored seven tries to lead his team into the semi-finals.

(Photo-Hagerty)

six tries in the competition, were the stars of Spain's giant killer act.

Spain bowed out of the com-

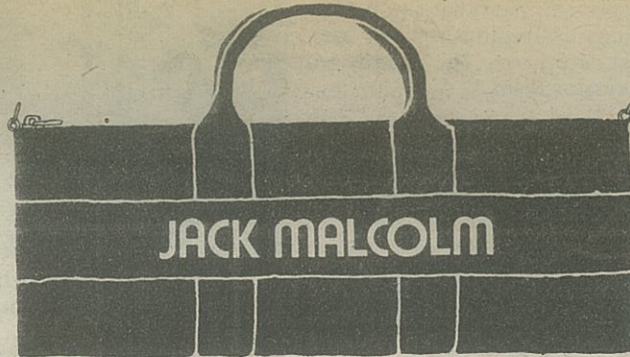
petition after a close 12-6 loss to Argentina in which the Spaniards gave a bruising lesson in defense.

England

After their loss to Spain, England's faint hopes of continuing into the quarter final round were

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The Eagles: (Front - L-R) Gray (player/coach), Saunders, Warhurst (captain), Caulder, Parris, Brewington. (Back) Fleener (manager), Jenkinson, Deddah, Titus, Peluso, Reagan (manager).

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Fiji's sensational Senivalati Laulau turns the corner against France and heads for the line. (Photo-Hagerty)

dashed when they were beaten by Australia, 24-6, in their second game. England was saved from total disgrace when they scored a try with two seconds remaining to beat the Netherlands 20-16.

To England's credit, it was great to see them and Wales in the competition. The two Home Countries added a tremendous amount to the appeal of the games.

In defense of their play, it must be noted that England did not field its best side as those whose teams were still in John Player Cup contention were not considered for selection.

Canada

Canada, like the U.S., did not have an impressive showing in Sydney. Their tally, however, was marginally better than the 0-4 record posted by the Eagles. Canada did manage a 10-10 draw with Korea, sandwiched between massive 1st and 3rd round losses to Fiji (32-0) and France (28-0).

Canada's only scoring, in the match against Korea, came on two tries by Mike Clarkin and a conversion by Tom Woods.

Canada's most impressive participant was wing Spencer Robinson, the team's youngest (20) and smallest (5'7", 150 lbs) player. Robinson was a bundle of energy making a number of enterprising runs and defending all over the field.

The Canadian team, coached by Mike Luke of St. John's, Newfoundland, and captained by Robin Russell of Vancouver, had eight B.C. players and two from Ontario. Vancouver and Victoria each contributed four players to the national side while centre Mike Clarkin of Ottawa and wing Spencer Robinson of Toronto round out the Canadian side.

Scotland and Ireland Missing

Although both England and Wales showed up wearing their national colors, Scotland and Ireland were conspicuous by their absence. Various reasons cited were the Five Nations Championship (which ended the weekend before), the overcrowded international schedule,

domestic commitments and too much pressure on top players.

Irish Rugby Union President Desmond McKibben recited these excuses to scattered boos at the tournament's Sunday banquet. It's hard for us to take McKibben at his word, however, because a week later, five Irish internationals including Trevor Ringland and Hugo MacNeill, took part in the annual Easter frolic in Bermuda.

Insiders informed us that the real reason Scotland and Ireland refused invitations, was the feeling on their part that the World Sevens Championship was "the first step on the road to professionalism."

Game Results:

Pool Games

(March 22, 1986)

- Australia 18, Netherlands 0
- New Zealand 11, Tonga 0
- Western Samoa 24, Romania 6
- Fiji 31, Canada 0
- England 6, Spain 24
- Wales 18, U.S.A. 0
- Argentina 27, Japan 0
- France 16, Korea 16
- Spain 12, Netherlands 6
- U.S.A. 4, Tonga 18
- Japan 6, Romania 12
- Korea 10, Canada 10

Lunch Break

- Australia 24, England 6
- New Zealand 12, Wales 18
- Western Samoa 0, Argentina 18
- Fiji 14, France 12
- England 20, Netherlands 16
- Wales 18, Tonga 12
- Argentina 21, Romania 4
- France 28, Canada 0
- Australia 18, Spain 10
- New Zealand 28, U.S.A. 0
- Western Samoa 10, Japan 6
- Fiji 18, Korea 6

Quarter Finals

(March 23, 1986—

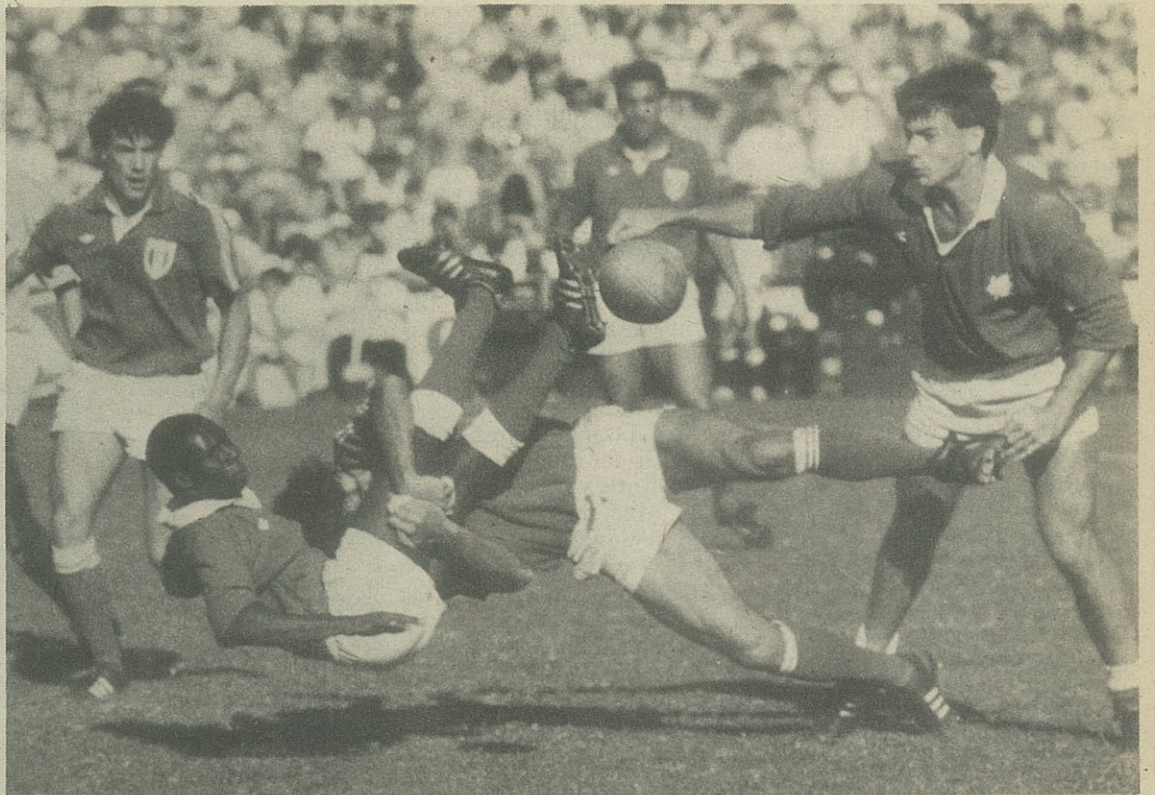
- Australia 14, Western Samoa 4
- Wales 12, France 8
- Argentina 12, Spain 6
- New Zealand 16, Fiji 0

Semi Finals

- Australia 18, Wales 6
- New Zealand 24, Argentina 4

Final

- New Zealand 32, Australia 0



Canada's Spencer Robinson is brought down by a spectacular French tackle. France beat Canada 28-0. (Photo-Hagerty)



A Spanish defender brings an Argentine ballcarrier to the ground in their quarter-final match. Argentina won this bruising game 12-6. (Photo-Hagerty)



The birds at Bondi Beach topped off a wonderful weekend in Sydney (Photo-Hagerty)