

HSBC extends commitment to Asian rugby

HONG KONG, CHINA: HSBC and Asian Rugby Football Union (ARFU) has announced the continuation of their partnership in support of the HSBC Asian 5 Nations (HSBC A5N), reputedly Asia's premier fifteen-aside rugby competition.



HSBC and ARFU also announced the inception of a new rugby property, the HSBC Asian Sevens Series. Both sponsorships will run for the next three years from 2011 - 2013.

Mark McCombe, CEO of HSBC Hong Kong and Giles Morgan, Group Head of Sponsorship for HSBC Holdings plc joined Trevor Gregory, vice-president of ARFU for the announcement. Dean Herewini, HSBC Penguin International Coaching Academy coach and the coach of Malaysia 15s was also in attendance. Also present were players from each of the 2011 HSBC A5N Top 5 nations: Ayumu Goromaru of Japan; Timur Mashurov of Kazakhstan; Simon Leung of Hong Kong; Cyrus Homyoum of the new UAE Rugby Association and Sean Wijesinghe of Sri Lanka, Asia's newest Top 5 team after promotion from Division I in 2010.

China 15s and 7s player and member of the China 7s coaching team Zhang Zhiqiang was also on hand to represent nations participating in the HSBC Asian Sevens Series.

Encouraging more involvement

Speaking on the double announcement, Mark McCombe, CEO of HSBC Hong Kong said, "The HSBC Asian 5 Nations has grown massively since its inception and is increasing in popularity around the region. By investing in the new HSBC Asian Sevens Series, in addition to the HSBC Sevens World Series, we aim to encourage more people to become involved with rugby union through the shortened form of the game in the build-up to the 2016 Olympic Games."

Alongside the HSBC A5N, the HSBC Asian Sevens will extend ARFU's international rugby footprint from April through November each season. The 2011 HSBC A5N Top 5 will again be held on consecutive weekends from 23 April to 21 May. Although identified by the elite Top 5 competition, HSBC A5N offers international competition or development support for all eligible ARFU unions. Outside of the Top 5, the tournament features five divisions, (up from four in 2010), offering test match rugby for 25 ARFU teams this season.

Coaching tour to boost the game

The HSBC Asian Sevens Series consists of four events in 2011, with two ranking events, the Shanghai and Borneo Sevens, staged in September 2011. Two other events will be held in Thailand and India next year. The ARFU international window for sevens competition runs from September through November. The rankings will be used to determine eligible spots for invitations to HSBC Sevens World Series tournaments including the Hong Kong Sevens, as well as potentially serving as qualifiers for multi-sport competitions such as the Asian and Olympic Games.

One constant for the coming years will be the commitment by both HSBC and ARFU to introducing rugby to new audiences through a coaching tour. This concept, first launched last year in conjunction with the HSBC Penguins International Coaching Academy, offered youth rugby clinics for over 3000 youth across 10 countries in 2010. HSBC and ARFU are committed to growing this programme in the year ahead.

HSBC ambassador and coach of Japan, John Kirwan, will join part of the coaching tour.

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