

Game 1 - Sydney Norths 12 - WA State 7

On a dry but bitterly cold day with a slight wind advantage, WA showed a great willingness to play an expansive game. When WA had the ball, they showed a tremendous ability to swing the ball from one side of the field to the other and the boys in gold were even running the ball from within their own 22m with some success. Unfortunately, they were unable to finish off the chances that were created.

WA's first scrum showed great shape but at the six minute mark, they conceded five points down the blind side. WA replied with good enterprise up the left flank where they almost scored. Soon after, Alex Oakley (15) scored from an inside pass from Nick Ward (12) under the posts, running hard and straight. Leading up to half time, the Norths side scored from a pick and drive from a penalty and WA were just too slow to recover in ABC defence. Again, just before the half time call WA showed good form up the left side of the field and nearly scored again.

After half time scrambling defence from Cody Coe-Baker (11) saved an almost certain try. Luke Connolly (front row) showed how a good forward should just run straight and power past the first line of defence. Despite sustained pressure in WA's 22m, they did not concede any further points in the game.

WA continually showed they were dangerous when they had the ball in hand. As the game progressed, they demonstrated structure and from structure came more phase ball and thus more chances. Former Wallaby and current national 7s coach Michael O'Connor came up to the coaching staff and congratulated them on the team's enterprise. He thought WA were unlucky to lose the game and pointed out one or two players who had caught his eye and said he saw great potential.

Game 2 - Sydney Wests 42 - WA State 12

Coach Andy Cole lined the boys up and told them this would be a big game and a defining point in their progression in the Championships. This Wests side was the favourites in the competition and the observation from the side-line is that they breed them big in Parramatta. WA conceded height and weight all round the park so scrum time was going to be interesting however, not once did WA lose a scrum against a much bigger set of forwards.

WA conceded a try in the first few minutes through a lack of urgency off a penalty. Wests scored again quickly through their No. 13 coming back in on the angle which was a very predictable play but effective. Kylan Yoxall (9) showed how to tackle, cover defend, be everywhere, save tries and snipe around the edges of the ruck. Alex Oakley (15) found a gap out wide and scored after some sustained pressure and several phases. This was the first time WA held onto the ball for any length of time but they showed what they could do with it when they had control of the game.

Again, they showed they had the ability to use the width of the field and tire the opposition forwards. Wests scored twice more from a charged down kick and an intercept pass inside their own 22m. Coach Cole thought aside from these two really soft tries, WA could have taken this game. John Vanderwielen (6) showed how it was done in the forwards as gold scored just before half time from sustained pressure leaving the half time score 28 - 12.

WA applied pressure from the restart and showed they were not going to lie down with a try almost resulting. Tom Enright (13) showed some great shoulder in his tackling and Yoxall again continued to cover, defend and snipe around the edges of the ruck. Some of the continuity in the game was outstanding with Luke Connolly (front row) being held up over the tryline.

Wests put on another two tries before the full-time whistle but Coach Cole and his staff were not displeased with the all round effort. Charles Roberts (front row) courageously continued playing even after he had broken his finger which typified the character on display. The scoreline in no way reflected the true nature of the game.

Game 3 - NSW Country 10 - WA State 10

This match represented the watershed in the squad's tour with a loss meaning a very average tour. It was always going to be difficult to get the boys up against a side that is well known for being strong contenders at these Championships.

From the kick-off, the WA side showed its true intent and aggressively attacked the ball and quickly took a three point lead. However, Gold seemed to be constantly caught behind their advantage line whilst their opposition always seemed to be making theirs. Chad Ramsay (backline) showed some good defence in the mid field.

After some sustained pressure, Country scored a try out wide but failed to convert. It was then WA's turn to apply pressure but it seemed the last pass failed to be properly executed to convert that pressure into points.

Country scored again mid way through the second half, but again failed to convert. The match continued to be a typical arm wrestle. In the last minutes of the game, WA stood up and applied more pressure on the Country side. Although WA lacked a bit of urgency and directness in attack, Alex Christian (8) scored in the dying seconds after a great scrum. Tim Kioatu (10) converted with pressure leaving the final score 10 all and this seemed a fair reflection of a tough and physical game.

Game 4. WA State 29 - Sydney Souths 5

After two losses and a draw, a win was desperately needed and it came in the form of Souths being "taken to the cleaners" by the men in gold. Again, WA was outsized in the scrums but our technical application proved far superior. Souths could boast a 140 Kg prop and he was brought on after it was clear from the first two scrums, that Souths were in trouble. This made no difference as WA pushed them back all day. This superiority in the scrum set the platform for the running backs to get away and show their running intent.

After 10 minutes, WA opened the scoring from a driving 5m lineout. WA scored again after sustained pressure in the opposition's half with the score now 12 - nil. This score remained until half time despite WA dominating possession and territory. Scrums and lineouts were going extremely well while Shane Gillham, John Vanderwielen and Alex Christian (forwards) all had great storming runs. At the half time talk, Coach Cole wanted WA to score first as he was looking for capitulation from the opposition.

From the restart, WA showed great intensity and applied more pressure. Cam Knox (9) scored twice in quick succession from close to the line, catching the opposition napping. Souths scored against the run of play in the corner at the death knell.

The significant points about this game were that the hit and cleaning out at the ruck was greatly improved. Scrums and lineouts were going really well and WA were driving low and past the ball at the rucks. With the quick ball on hand, the backs were finding regular holes in the opposition's defence.

Game 5. WA State 34 - ACT Schools 0

This was the last game of the five game series and the boys were tired, bruised and battered. Coach Cole spoke quietly to them before the game explaining that a win here with a bonus point and WA will come a creditable third in the Championships. ACT and WA had always been bitter but friendly rivals in this competition and it would be good to “do them” in this match.

The game started at a cracking pace and the physical nature of the game was really quite apparent. The backs were constantly making the gain line but were unable to finish off good ball to score. Finally, after five minutes Cody Coe-Baker (11) scored out wide. Luke Connolly (front row) and Johnny Vanderwielen (second row) had great storming runs followed by Alex Christian (8) who ran at the defence, hard and straight, with the ball in two hands. The pay off was the second try.

The WA side again played an expansive game, with some outstanding cleaning out at the rucks. WA scored just prior to half time with Harry Hales (2) moving off the back of a ruck close to the opposition line. WA were now starting to exploit the large holes appearing in the defence.

Chad Ramsay (backline) and Tim Koiatu (backline) showed great strength in the game and were rewarded with a try each late in the second half. The ever busy and bustling Kylan Yoxall (14) scored the final try close to the corner right at full time. One great thing was the fact that WA had kept a good side scoreless.

Summary

It was five game series in which WA performed admirably and a gained a third placed position out of six teams. It is clear that the WA side improved markedly in each game and were individually better performing players at the end of the tournament. The intensity, physicality and speed of the competition take time to adjust to. The WA boys certainly adjusted well and their results showed on the scoreboard. It would have been interesting to rematch it with the first two sides as the coaching staff believed they could have won against them based on their rate of improvement.