



INFORMATION PAGE

Week of January 21st, 2005

1 IRB Sevens in Los Angeles

BE THERE, if you possibly can. Three weeks from now this magnificent event takes place at the excellent Home Depot Centre.

Go to web site <http://www.usasevens.com/> to book your tickets, and read "44 MATCHES, SIXTEEN NATIONS, ONE INCREDIBLE WEEKEND".

This pre-eminent event in North America features New Zealand, England, Fiji, South Africa, Australia, Argentina and France.

And, of course, you will be able to cheer for your NAWIRA favourites: **USA, Canada, West Indies** and **Mexico**.

Cheap airfares are available at this time of year.

2 Best Practice

The Youth Development Symposium that was held in Jamaica in November featured a number of best practice presentations. This week, I include a fine paper that was presented by Noel O. Adonis, the Senior Vice President of the Guyana Rugby Football Union. My thanks go to Noel for kindly allowing the wide circulation of his excellent account.

School and Youth Rugby Development The Guyana Experience

Introduction

Development and by extension the modes and strategies utilised towards that end are usually a consequence of several factors. Very often, therefore, developmental actions or activities are dictated by the peculiarities of the particular environment or circumstances in which such development is expected to take place. This is as true for Rugby as it is for any other developmental project intended. Thus, while there may be significant commonalities among members in the WIRU region, there are substantial local differences in the mix of available resources and circumstances which work together to dictate particular types of responses by individual countries. This is certainly true of Guyana.

Geographical characteristics

Guyana, formerly known as British Guiana, is located on the northern coast of the South American mainland. The country is bordered by Venezuela in the west, Brazil in the south, Suriname in the East and the Atlantic Ocean, which blends into the Caribbean sea, in the north.

By virtue of its location and Geography, Guyana would, more properly, have been expected to establish closest ties with its nearest neighbours on the mainland. This, however, has not been so, and language, history and tradition, in this instance, have come together to supercede Geography. Guyana is the only English speaking country on the South American mainland and, from the inception, had developed historical, political, social and economic ties with the rest of the, largely, English speaking Caribbean. This has come to be generally accepted, formally recognised and acknowledged by most major regional and international institutions, including the IRB.

Demography

In comparison with other Caribbean territories, Guyana is huge, with a land mass of 83,000 sq. miles (approximately 215,000 sq. kilometres). The size of the country, however, is not matched by numbers in the population which, at last count, was just under 800,000. With current emigration patterns, it is not likely that this number would get much higher, for many years to come.

The vast majority of the population in the country is confined to towns and villages dispersed along the more than two hundred miles of narrow coastal belt. Major concentrations of people can be found in Georgetown, the Capital city, New Amsterdam, Rose Hall, Anna Regina, Bartica and Linden. It is apposite to note that none of these locations is within sixty miles from Georgetown. Most of them are separated from each other by one of the three main rivers: the Demerara, the Essequibo and Berbice. The latter two rivers can be traversed only by ferry while the Demerara may be traversed either by ferry or by vehicular traffic via the Demerara Harbour Bridge.

Rugby: Early Development

Similar to what would have transpired in most of the other Caribbean territories Rugby came to Guyana as a part of the colonialist experience. The British came and they brought their sport with them. The French apparently did the same.

Rugby was introduced into Guyana in the early 1900s. Records reflect that the first inter-regional tournament, the McGregor Championships, was first played between Guyana and Trinidad in 1929. This series was intended to be contested on an annual basis, with the two countries alternating as venues for the tournament. For more than fifty years the series was contested on a fairly regular basis until the mid 1990s when a divergence of interests led to a cessation of the tournament.

In the meanwhile Rugby was being played, mainly by adults, solely in Georgetown, and, in the first instance, primarily by expatriates and others from the upper echelons of the society. Whether intended or not, Rugby at this stage manifested a Caucasian outlook. Quite naturally, therefore, even if there were no physical barriers, psychological and psycho-social barriers developed and became entrenched. Rugby came to be seen as the strange and exclusive preserve of a small sector of society whose sole aim it seemed was to segregate themselves from the rest of the community. Even after efforts were made in the 1960s to extend the boundaries of the sport and increase its popularity, it took some time to remove those early impressions and change the image. Although the game was extended to Linden in this period, Rugby never had more than five active clubs. By that time soccer and cricket had become preferred sports and were also more easily accessible by the general population, including children.

Youth outreach

Early efforts to introduce the game at youth level via the schools were made in the early 60s and again in the mid 70s. While bearing some fruit, neither of these two incursions was successful in the sense of being sustained for an extended period.

The current programme could be said to have had its origins in 1998, following Guyana's unsuccessful efforts in the 1996 and 1997 Caribbean Championships. At those championships, it became apparent that Guyana could no longer depend only on players coming into the game in their late teens. The dynamics of the game had changed. Players were now required to be more knowledgeable, more skilled, more professional and more prepared for the rigours and demands of the modern game. Additionally, with the earlier advent of the World Cup, the game had adopted a global perspective. The International Rugby Board had begun to evidence greater interest in the development of the game around the world. Trust grants for development were being made available. Furthermore, neighbouring territories in the Caribbean had already moved in the direction of school and youth programmes, and their national programmes had already begun to benefit.

With this impetus, the GRFU invited member clubs in 1998 to focus on youth development within their organisations. By 1999, only one club had responded seriously. But, there was evidence of substantial interest among the youths. In that year also the Southern Caribbean Championships were held in Guyana and Elwin Chase, a product of the original club outreach made his debut at age 16.

School and Youth Development Programme

In 2000, the GRFU formally launched its School and Youth Development Programme with four schools in Georgetown and a joint-school programme in Linden. That year also saw the appointment of the first Local (Youth) Development Officer, Mr. Laurence Adonis.

Factors related to appointment of LDO's

The motivation for that appointment, and the subsequent direction the programme has followed in Guyana, was a consequence of several factors:

- 1 Availability of Funds: With the advent of the IRB's Trust Grant Scheme, geared towards development projects and activities, Unions that met the criteria for the award could be relatively assured of a reliable source of annual income.
- 2 Need to stretch limited resources: Notwithstanding the availability of the Grant, we recognised from the outset that we needed to be creative in the use of the funds. For us, it therefore made economic sense that if we could purchase the resources locally, and support it with periodic external training, support and exposure, then it would mean that we could stretch the little we had a lot further.
- 3 Development of local resources: With the appointment of an external professional, we would have only been able to have his expertise for a short while. On the other hand investment in local resources, while not faultless, would usually lend to greater stability and sustainability.
- 4 Culture: Observation of what was happening in other territories indicated that insertion of an external professional often resulted in a clash of cultures, and as a consequence compromised development.
- 5 Guyana's location in relation to the rest of the region: For quite some time Guyana had been experiencing a phenomenon in which teams, coaches etc. would come to other parts of the region and leave without visiting Guyana. Very often we, in Guyana, would learn about the arrival of the individual or team after they had departed. We are still to be apprised of reasons for that strange reluctance. This became manifest in some of our early enquiries, as we sought initially to identify an external professional.
- 6 Success of the early programme: Much of our decision making was, however, made easier by the fact that we had started the programme with local resources, without funding support and the early results were encouraging.

Aims of the programme

Major aims of the programme were/are:

- To increase the number of schools involved in the programme.
- To expand the player base.
- To spread the game to other regions of Guyana.
- To introduce a schools Rugby league for boys.
- To introduce a schools Rugby league for girls.
- To obtain additional equipment and material for the programme.
- To provide additional training opportunities for Local Development Officers.
- To consolidate the youth programme at club level.
- To participate in regional/international youth tournaments.

Achievements

In that year, 2000, Guyana participated in its first youth competition in the region: an U16 tournament in Trinidad and Tobago. Present also at that tournament were Barbados, Jamaica, Martinique, St. Vincent, Venezuela and hosts T&T. Guyana finished a creditable third.

In 2001, two more schools were added to the programme and a second Local Development Officer was appointed. An U19 team was taken to a tournament in Guadeloupe where Barbados, Bahamas, Trinidad and Martinique along with the hosts also participated. Again Guyana's performance was heartening.

In 2002, one Development Officer migrated and was replaced. Two school tournaments were held locally with children participating in games at the U14, U16 and U18 categories. Five schools were involved in the first tournament and six in the second. An U17 team was taken to St. Vincent where they participated with a fair degree of success (2nd place) against Barbados and the hosts in a three-way tournament.

In 2003, a third Development Officer was added. Three more schools were brought into the programme and Guyana participated successfully as hosts in an U16 tournament which included Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad. Guyana also hosted the NAWIRA regional RWC U19 qualifier and emerged as Caribbean Champions.

In 2004, Guyana repeated as Caribbean Champions, at a tournament in Trinidad. Locally, a school's league for boys in three age categories is set to begin.

Throughout the life of the programme two integral components have been foremost in our planning and implementation strategy. The first was/is the acquisition of equipment, training material and other educational resources. Second; a special effort has also been made to ensure that Development Officers are exposed to as many training opportunities as possible with a view to increasing their competency levels and keeping them and our Rugby current.

Challenges

The programme has not been without its challenges. Some may be described as local and others as regional:

(a) Local

- Lack of institutional support as evidenced by teacher disinterest in learning the game and assuming internal responsibility for its coordination.
- An apparent lack of seasonal coordination in the schools sports programmes. Divergent student interests and school demands.
- Insufficient preparation for transition from school to club
- Migration of resources, both at the levels of players and coaches.

(b) Regional

- Lack of a detailed and clearly articulated youth programme/tournament schedule for the Caribbean/NAWIRA.
- Insufficient funding for youth tournaments.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, whatever is done in the different territories and member Unions, an integral element and incentive in the development of the game, locally and regionally,

must be the opportunity to test the teams and individuals in competition. Accommodation, therefore, must be made for a regular tournament schedule for the age categories being addressed. This is ultimately the responsibility of our regional bodies WIRU and NAWIRA. Lady and Gentlemen that ball is in your possession, in your half of the field.

Best wishes to all,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'T' and 'J'.

Tom Jones
Regional Development Manager