

## **Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> June – ‘twas the night before Sevens...**

The first major event of the Deloitte Cayman Sevens kicked off last night with dinner followed by drinks at the Hard Rock Café in George Town, Grand Cayman. It was an opportunity for teams to meet and pretend to be sociable whilst quietly sizing each other up and planning strategies. Although some players bowed out early, notably the strong Samurai (last year's winners) and Fijian Barbarians teams, many remained to partake of the food and beverages at hand.

The Canadian Strathcona Druids, sponsored by Five Continents, were in fine fettle, with their emblem depicting the Welsh Dragon in a nod to their club's roots. Established in 1960 as only the fourth rugby club in Alberta, the Druids' club membership has grown over the years to produce teams playing both Fifteens and Sevens rugby. This is the first time that the Druids have participated in the Cayman Sevens tournament, although as Brent Gallagher (Head Coach) and Mark Coons (President) were quick to mention, it is not the first time that some of the team members have visited the island to play. Who knew that our very own Griz was their club coach at some point in the misty past, and what possessed them to admit it? Although the lads are quietly confident of holding their own and presenting some fierce competition, they acknowledge that the level of Sevens rugby at this tournament will be second-to-none. The general consensus among a number of the visiting teams this year is that whereas in past Cayman Sevens' events the field of talent has been quite widely spread, that field has narrowed considerably over the years and no team can be counted out of the running. The Druids are here on a mission to compete (and indulge in some recreational pursuits, no doubt) and are already looking to the Deloitte Cayman Sevens 2007, to which they hope to be invited. Look out for these boys on the pitch – if Brent Gallagher's piercing, unflinching (almost unnerving) gaze is anything to go by, they're not going down without a fight!

Susies Exiles, fresh from a win at the Benidorm Sevens a couple of weekends ago, may end up being the team to beat this year. Manager John Aldridge considers their sixth place finish at last year's Cayman Sevens Tournament to have been "unlucky" and has no problem emphasizing the prediction that that particular lightning will not strike twice – a topical comment considering the present weather outside! There is no doubt that Susies Exiles, sponsored by Amsterdam's Susie's Saloon, are going to be tough nuts to crack. They have proven consistently what a strong team they are over the last tournaments they've played and are considered by James Davies, Manager of Samurai, to be his team's toughest competition. They have played together successfully in recent weeks, giving them a distinct advantage over teams that have pulled in players from other clubs or countries just prior to this tournament. Susies Exiles have gained an impressive reputation for themselves in a very short period of time – not bad for a club that started only seven years ago and was originally a thrown-together pub side. They are well recognized on the European circuit and have found it an excellent way to scout other players for their side. Both John Aldridge and George Lucas, Team Member (yes, it is his name and yes, I embarrassed myself by questioning him skeptically for far too long), prefer the Sevens game over other forms of rugby, not just for its fast pace but as a spectator sport. The crowd gets so involved at the major tournaments such as the Dubai,

Hong Kong and Wellington Sevens that you can't help but be swept up in the excitement of the event. If Samurai consider Susies Exiles to be worthy adversaries, they will certainly be a team to watch closely as the Deloitte Cayman Sevens begin tonight!

Team Samurai, sponsored by Deloitte, needs no introduction. The first team to have won two Deloitte Cayman Sevens' titles (2003, 2005) they are definitely back to defend their title. Samurai have 70% of the players that made up the winning team last year – Red Rock Fijians – and their early departure from the festivities at Hard Rock implies that they are here to win first and party later. Manager James Davies felt that it was apropos to bring back the same group of men that took home the 2005 Deloitte Cayman Sevens Cup (another Samurai team is presently playing in Rome, featuring English and Welsh players) as they will be on familiar territory, and really it's only fair that the other teams are given a chance to beat the true holders of last year's cup! All the other players in this tournament, including the Barbarians, know that Samurai are warriors and will defend their turf with all of their might!

The men right in the thick of it will be the referees, calling vital plays and trying not to get mauled in the process. Paul Mowser, John Weale, Steve Harland, Alan Biggs and Chris Sharp all appear to be equal to the task, as four of the five have already presided over Cayman Sevens tournaments in the past and all referee international and domestic games on a regular basis. John, Steve and Alan agree that the Deloitte Cayman Sevens is the highest quality Sevens tournament they have refereed, based on level of play and professional organization – hurrah! Could they just be trying to wangle another invitation for next year? Why question? Obviously they are men clear of vision and noble of manner, which was no better represented than when the refs took to the stage for karaoke later on in the evening, thumping out “Delilah” followed by an equally emotional “Wonderwall.” Had any of the members of the visiting teams still been lingering, they surely would have been breathing a sigh of relief that their Sevens decisions rested in the hearts and minds of these five men and true.

The evening ended with no loss of life, but perhaps slightly battered ear drums, and even though the weather was miserable through the night, it now appears to be clearing just in time for the first day of the big event.

Let the Sevens begin!!!