



PRESS RELEASE

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HKRFU ANNOUNCE SQUAD FOR HISTORIC FIRST TOUR OF EUROPE

Team faces 3 test matches vs. Germany, Czech Republic and Holland in 7 days

[Hong Kong, 23 November 2009] – The Hong Kong Rugby Football Union (HKRFU) have announced the 28-man squad that will represent Hong Kong on the HKRFU's first Tour of Europe in its 57-year history.

Demonstrating the HKRFU's increasing depth at national level, the squad features 11 new caps and will have a challenging stint ahead of them facing three test matches in seven days in the dead of a Northern European winter.

The Tour will be an effective gauge for where Hong Kong stands in world rugby's pecking order as all four teams are within shouting distance on the IRB World Rankings. As of November 16 2009, Germany is ranked 27th in the world, one spot ahead of Asia's second ranked team, Kazakhstan, and six ahead of 34th ranked Hong Kong. The Netherlands and the Czech Republic rank 35th and 36th respectively.

Fourteen of the 22-man squad that played in Hong Kong's last test, against Kazakhstan in May 2009, are included in the squad for Europe. Notable absences due to work and personal commitments are Sevens captain Jeff Wong, and a trio of veterans, prop Nigel Hobler, speedy winger Simon Smith and hard charging centre Simon Hempel.

Among the newcomers to the side are Hong Kong Football Club lock Charles French and the find of this year's Sevens season, Salom Yiu Kam Shing. The eleven new caps are French, Yiu, sevens squad member Fan Shun Kei, Jack Bennett, Graham Manchester, Nick Hewson, Alex Baddeley, So Hok Ken, Tom McColl, Sebastian Perkins and Gavin Hadley.

Hong Kong will take on Germany in Heidelberg on Saturday, December 12th before travelling to Prague for the match against the Czech Republic on December 16th and then to Amsterdam to face Holland on the 19th.

The tour will play a fundamental role in Hong Kong's continuing Rugby World Cup 2011 qualification campaign, which will culminate in the 2010 HSBC Asian Five Nations in April and May. The winner of next year's Asian Five Nations Top 5 competition will advance directly to Rugby World Cup 2011 while the runner-up will enter a play-off for the final team slot in New Zealand.

While Hong Kong's European opposition is largely an unknown quantity, on paper Germany remains the strongest opponent. Hong Kong will face them with the least amount of preparation, as it is the opening match of the tour. The Hong Kong XV have only managed to train for four sessions to date as players have been involved with club rugby commitments and the build-up to the East Asian Games Rugby Sevens competition on December 5 and 6 in Hong Kong.

Germany regularly compete in the European Nations Cup, the senior men's rugby tournament for European nations below the Six Nations. Following victory in Division Two of that tournament in 2007-8, Germany was promoted to Division One, where they regularly compete against other European rugby heavyweights such as Russia, Portugal and Spain.

Preparing for the challenge ahead, Hong Kong National Coach Dai Rees said, "The tour is a bit of an unknown really as we don't know all that much about our opposition. We expect the Germans to make use of their large forward pack which is an issue we will need to address."

"I'm pleased that the squad we have truly represents Hong Kong Rugby. It blends veteran and promising fifteens players with our sevens players in a way that I don't think has been achieved before. Seven of the guys currently involved in the East Asian Games [ED: Rugby Sevens] squad will be leaving with us for Europe just four days after that tournament. When we return the focus will remain on our key objective for 2010, the Rugby World Cup qualifiers in April and May."

“We do have a number of uncapped players but it is an experienced squad. We’ll be bringing back a deeper pool of players from Europe, all of whom will be competing for a spot in the team for the Asian Five Nations and Rugby World Cup qualifiers.”

As to the team’s expectations, Rees says that the goal is to bring home at least two wins but there is also a strategic intent:

“Primarily we want to season the players a bit, to get them more exposure to different playing styles, cultures and aggressiveness. We play a Northern Hemisphere club season so it made sense to tour Europe, especially when we looked around and saw the number of European Tier III nations that are on or at the same level as us. If we get a few wins it should move us up the world rankings a bit as well.”

“We want the tour to be enjoyable but also to take the guys out of their comfort zones as it will be good preparation for our upcoming qualification matches for the Rugby World Cup.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

Hong Kong Tour of Europe Schedule

Germany v Hong Kong

Venue: Fritz Grunebaum Stadium, Heidelberg, Germany

Date: Saturday, December 12, 2009

Kick-off: 14.30

Czech Republic v Hong Kong

Venue: Slavia Synot Arena, Prague, Czech Republic

Date: Wednesday, December 16, 2009

Kick-off: 19.00

Holland v Hong Kong

Venue: Rugby Stadium, Amsterdam

Date: Saturday, 19 December, 2009

Kick-off: 16.00

Hong Kong will play Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea and Arabian Gulf in RWC2011 Qualification in April and May 2010.

MANAGEMENT TEAM	
Name	Title
Dai Rees	National Coach
Brian Higgins	Assistant Coach
Nathan Stewart	Fitness and Conditioning Coach
Kane Jury	Analyst
Aaron Smith	Physiotherapist

SQUAD		
NAME	CLUB	POSITION
Andy LI	Kowloon	Prop
Peter SPIZZIRRI	HKFC	Prop
Alex NG Wai Shing	Valley	Prop
Jack BENNETT	Valley	Prop
Jon ABEL	DeA	Hooker
Grapes LAI Tsz Leung	Kowloon	Hooker
Ivan ZENOVIC	DeA	Lock
Graham MANCHESTER	DeA	Lock
Nick HURRELL	Kowloon	Lock
Nigel CLARKE	DeA	Flanker
KWOK Ka Chun	Kowloon	Flanker
Simon LEUNG Ho Yam	HKCC	No. 8
Nick HEWSON	Valley	Flanker
Alex BADDELEY	Valley	Flanker / Hooker
FAN Shun Kei	DeA	Scrumhalf
Tim ALEXANDER	Valley	Scrumhalf
SO Hok Ken	Kowloon	Scrumhalf
Keith ROBERTSON	DeA	Outside half
Tom McCOLL	Kowloon	Centre
Kenzo PANNELL	Causeway Bay	Flyhalf
Mark WRIGHT	HKFC	Centre
TSANG Hing Hung	DeA	Centre
Rowan VARTY	DeA	Centre
Adam RABY	HKFC	Wing
Salom YIU Kam Shing	Valley	Wing
Sebastian PERKINS	HKFC	Wing
Mike McKEE	Overseas/HKFC	Fullback
Gavin HADLEY	Newcastle University	Fullback
Charles FRENCH	HKFC	Lock

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