



Rugby Sevens

On and off the field

Ah, rugby. The scrums. The smack-downs. The scores. The screams of little children ... in the bouncy castle? You betcha.

On 1 and 2 November, when the teams participating in the Singapore Cricket Club's International Rugby Sevens (SCC Sevens) hit the Padang field in the heart of downtown, there will be more than tackling, passing and teeth getting knocked out. There will be music, food, games and, of course, a "rugby" bouncy castle to keep the family in a playful mood.

This is the 61st year that SCC is hosting a seven-a-side tournament, making it the oldest continual international sporting event in Asia. All those years of bringing high-profile rugby to Singapore have taught the organisers a thing or two, namely

that the engagement on the field is just one component of having a successful weekend. Keeping the spectators engaged is the other.

That's why this year's "village" will offer food and beverages from famous chefs and Singaporean food-sellers. In addition to the bouncy castle, the kids' play area will feature slides, swings, air tattoos and a variety of games.

Meanwhile, grown-ups can get as childish as they want with the happy-hour prices on a variety of boozy beverages. As the action on the field winds down each day, the dance floor will start up with the help of local bands.

Make no mistake, though. Despite the carnival atmosphere,

the rugby will be serious, with such renowned teams as New Zealand's Ponsonby, Fiji's Davetalevu, the British Army UK, and the Durban Harlequins from South Africa all competing to take home either the cup, a plate, a shield or the jug. Milton Froggatt, the manager of the Ponsonby team, says, "The SCC Sevens is a superb experience. It brings many different cultures together to chase an oval ball in the best spirit of the game."

Sevens-a-side rugby is, by its nature a fast-paced, enthralling game. Matches last only 15 minutes, during which the action barely slows. Commenting on this unique form of the sport,

by Michael Franco



former New Zealand All Black and current SCC team coach Terry Wright had this to say: "Rugby is not complicated by technicalities. You get the ball and you hang on to it as long as you can until you score a try."

But no matter how hot the battle grows on the field, the weekend invariably remains good-natured. Damien Pereira, a Singapore rugby personality who has worked hard to further the sport among children, says, "It is a friendly sevens. There are no barriers, so players can mix with spectators, spectators can mix with players."

The feel-good vibe felt throughout the SCC Sevens weekend begins before the players hit the field. And it lasts long after the Ablitt Cup is awarded.

The SCC is known for the hospitality it shows to visiting teams. "There is no other tournament they go to where they have such interaction with the host club," says committee chairman Jon Robinson. "The teams arrive early and we make sure they are well-hosted. There is no entry fee for teams. We treat them like guests in our homes, and provide meals, physio, and the chance to train."

Froggatt certainly appreciates the opportunity the tournament gives his team. "For our young aspiring players there is no better stage than the SCC Sevens to showcase their skills and make a name for themselves in front of an international audience. SCC Sevens has played a major

role in the development of many of our young players, learning the touring lifestyle and setting the benchmark for the standards required to play at a professional level. It is the most enjoyable and well run tournament on the map."

It's appropriate that the visiting athletes are treated so well, as many of them invariably go on to become superstars of the sport. Imagine, then, the delight on the faces of youngsters as the visiting athletes show up at their schools in the weeks leading up to the tournament.

It's part of the SCC Sevens' commitment to developing the sport among young people in Singapore and worldwide. In addition to bringing visiting athletes to schools for rugby workshops, the club also sponsors coaching development programmes as well as referee training. They have created rugby starter kits containing balls, cones, tackle bags and bibs, which are distributed to schools to help introduce the game to children who have never heard of a scrum or a ruck.

And they've supported Project Breakthrough, a Hong Kong organisation that introduces sports to troubled youth as a way of channelling their energies away from crime.

It shows that, while there might be some blood and mud on the pitch, there will also be a plenty of love extending beyond the field's boundary lines – well into the future of a sport with a lot of heart. 🏉

Tickets are available through SISTIC, \$20 for the weekend. The sporting action is scheduled from dawn to dusk both days, but the party has been known to charge along until midnight or later.