

Can Rugby in the United States Catch up to the rest of the world?

“I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve” Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto December 7, 1941. This is a quote used today to make the claim that the US has woken up and started building the infrastructure to bring a more competitive team to World Rugby. But can they catch up by 2027?

The land of the free has certainly taken steps towards infrastructure with the development of the MLR (Major League Rugby) and also PR7's (Premiere Rugby 7's). However, lack of quality pay, controversy and player selection stereotypes makes some in America wonder if the best players are being selected. Sure, with amazing talent like Caolan Dooley from Ireland, or Jason Robertson from New Zealand you can see the idea America and the MLR have for growing the game. These high level players come at a cost though. While player salaries are not public information the salary cap is. With a roster size of 38 and a salary cap set at \$500,000 with a \$250,000 bonus if development incentives are met. We are averaging just over \$13,000 per player if no bonus and just under \$20,000 per player with the bonus. With some teams being able to roster 10 internationals for a match one would assume a larger payout is required.

To ask a developing player to uproot their life to travel thousands of miles away from career opportunities and family for less than you could make on a minimum wage job is a hard ask. Many wonder if the talent pool is suffering simply on this fact alone. In alignment with the salary cap issue is the issue of teams not being able to keep up with the burden of operating. Since the formation of the MLR 4 teams have folded with a 5th team The Dallas Jackals withdrawing from the 2025 season. The Jackals reason for leaving? A key investor leaving. The MLR competition is left with 11 remaining teams and only 5 of those teams are from the inaugural season in 2018.

Although the infrastructure is growing, opportunity seems to be stagnant. It is widely known that one of the biggest misses with USA Rugby is the opportunity given to certain sections of the country. Most players find themselves having to leave where they are to try to be seen making a splash either in Texas or California for example. So do places like the Midwest not fit USA Rugby's mold? Or is the Midwest just not loud enough? Either way if America wants to be relevant on the bigger stage, something will need to change.

On the next article see how PR7's is trying to grow the game of 7's and making

it into the next major US competition.