

CAP-ITAL IDEA TO LIFT HK

Sevens is king in this city, but coach Dai Rees has come up with a plan to boost the profile of the 15-a-side game, reports **Alvin Sallay**

Cap in hand, literally, Dai Rees wants more from his players in the next 12 months as Hong Kong rugby confronts the challenge of qualifying for the 2011 World Cup.

On Friday, for the first time in the history of the Hong Kong Rugby Football Union, caps were handed out to the 27 players involved in the HSBC Asian Five Nations where Hong Kong finished fourth, just ahead of Singapore who will be relegated next year.

The presentation of the velvet cap – every player will only get one in his career no matter how many times he plays for Hong Kong – is the idea of Rees, who has taken a leaf from the practice of more-established rugby nations and believes this is one way of fostering pride in representing the city.

In the past, the pride of playing for Hong Kong in sevens has taken centre stage. Rees wants to change that and hopes this season's Asian Five Nations is the first step towards the 15-a-side game moving up the priority list.

"The highest-profile tournament in town has always been the Hong Kong Sevens and playing at this tournament has been the main goal for players in the past, but hopefully all that will change," Rees said.

"The A5N has created a buzz now and by awarding these caps the focus will be on getting one of these in the future, and we want players to start thinking of 15s as their main aim," he said.

Rees, a former assistant coach with the



It's all smiles as Charles Cheung and Kwok Ka-chun receive their international caps from Dai Rees. Photo: Martin Kibble

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Dai Rees

Welsh Gwent Dragons, might not have had the perfect start to his marriage with Hong Kong rugby. Appointed as head coach last November, his honeymoon was short-lived as first Japan (59-6) and then South Korea (36-34) pricked his bubble earlier this month.

Hong Kong rebounded with a nine-try romp past minnows Singapore (64-6) before going down tamer to Kazakhstan (25-6) in Almaty last Sunday to finish fourth – down one position from last year – and also slip down the IRB world rankings to 34.

But most significant is the fact that two of their main rivals – South Korea (24th) and Kazakhstan (27th) – are ahead of them as the race for second place in Asia heats up when next year's A5N decides who gets the automatic slot to go to the World Cup and who drops into the repechage in qualifying.

Asia's top-ranked side and A5N champions Japan (16), who remained unbeaten for the second successive year, are all but assured of the automatic berth, leaving the rest to fight for second place. Rees remains confident that Hong Kong can overturn this year's results and win that repechage place.

"Next year we will be playing both South Korea and Kazakhstan at home and that is a huge plus. We went to Korea and narrowly lost to them. True, we didn't play well and under-achieved against Kazakhstan, but I'm confident we can turn that around," he said.

Before the campaign began, Rees said the team were a "work in progress". The broad brush strokes need to be put into the small details that ultimately will be the difference between a masterpiece and a pavement etching.

Final standings						
Team Nation	Team Nation	Win	Loss	Points for	Points against	Total points
Japan	4	4	0	271	41	24
Kazakhstan	4	3	1	88	139	15
South Korea	4	2	2	218	144	13
Hong Kong	4	1	3	110	126	8
Singapore	4	0	4	40	196	1

SMP GRAPHIC

"We know we can contest against Korea and Kazakhstan and know what it will take to beat them," Rees said. "But to do that we need to work on increasing our skill levels."

Skill levels like ball-handling and ball-control let Hong Kong down at crucial times. Rees also decried the defensive structure, especially in one-on-one situations and said it lacked "intensity".

"Apart from basic skills we also suffered in our set-pieces. Against Kazakhstan we lost 80 per cent of our lineout ball due to poor throw-ins or poor lifting. By jumping early we telegraphed our intentions. Our scrummaging technique could have been better."

Hong Kong were out-muscled by the bigger Kazakhstan forwards in the set-pieces as well as at the breakdown. Despite playing with 13 men for most of the second half, Kazakhstan easily defended their tryline against a toothless Hong Kong attack. But Rees refused to be downhearted.

"We've got to grow our own style of rugby. We are not a big physical side. We've got to play like we did in the second half against Korea and against Singapore using our speed and agility to attack."

Hong Kong came back from a 33-6 deficit at half-time to almost pull off an improbable victory against South Korea. The substitution of flyhalf Kenzo Pannell midway through the second half robbed the side of an accurate goalkicker and it counted with replacement Jonny Elliott missing two conversions as Hong Kong fell short 36-34.

Winger Adam Raby scored a hat-trick in his first international, and followed it up with four more in the next game against Singapore, but Rees says he is still not the full monty.

"I'm picking on Raby as the example because he played well but struggled to find that intensity and ferocity against a bigger team like Kazakhstan. He, and the others, now know how intense it can be on the international scene."

The players who most impressed Rees this season were flanker Nigel Clarke ("outstanding again"), scrumhalf Jeff Wong (by far the best No 9), centre Rowan Varty ("outstanding"), centre Simon Hempel ("immense") and flanker Kwok Ka-chun ("find of the championship").

Significantly, no one from the tight five was mentioned – an area which Rees says is a concern. "Jon [Abel, the hooker] was a superb captain off the field but he has a lot to work on in his own game. I have two props, who are 33 [Pete Spizzirri] and 36 [Nigel Hobler] and this is a concern."

"We have not developed forwards and this is a huge worry. We have to encourage the clubs to play players who are eligible to represent Hong Kong. Two guys who impressed me, Alex Ng and Grapes Lai, don't get much First Division rugby."

"I don't want to exclude anyone from playing, but the front row and tight five are a concern. We need to develop more forwards, but subconsciously, in Hong Kong, everyone's focus is on sevens. I hope that will change now," Rees added, cap in hand.

Too tough a blow even for Tyson?

Tim Dahlberg



There's a picture stuck away in a box somewhere in my house of a younger Mike Tyson standing behind my son, his arms draped over him and a huge smile on his face.

The picture never made the family album, was never brought out to show around when friends came over. Brian never asked me to have it framed.

It was taken at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas in 1990, and by that time Tyson's life had already spun far out of control and disintegrated into soap-opera status. His wife at the time had accused him on national TV of abusing her, he had lost the only two father figures he had ever known and, thanks to Buster Douglas, he was no longer the heavyweight champion of the world.

Soon he was going to be charged with rape. It wasn't the time to be showing his picture around.

Not that I had any worries about letting my son hang briefly with the baddest man on the planet. With Tyson you got pretty much what you saw, with none of the phroness or pretentiousness of most athletes.

A lot of times it wasn't pretty, and a lot of times the decisions he made were pretty bad. But there was an underlying endearing quality to Tyson that was missed by those more interested in his left hook or his many problems.

You could see by the way he joked with my son and put his arm around him that he loved kids. That may have been because in many ways he was still a kid himself.

A kid who failed after failing to make the 1984 Olympic team. A kid who had no idea what to do when promoters and so-called friends were shoving their hands in his suddenly deep pockets.

A kid who took an awfully long time to grow up.

He's led his life under intense public scrutiny since he was a teen,

He's gone through enough highs and lows to last five lifetimes. But no parent should have to go through this

and people were often as transfixed by him as they were repulsed by some of the things he did. At times it was comic, most times it was tragic, but all the time people watched.

He's gone through enough highs and lows to last five lifetimes. But no parent should ever have to go through this.

The news that Tyson's four-year-old daughter died after a freak accident at home in Phoenix came as a jarring reminder of how things can go terribly wrong just as they finally seem to be going right.

Exodus Tyson died a day after her neck apparently got caught in the cord of a treadmill.

Tyson was in Las Vegas at the time, riding a wave of mostly favourable publicity since a documentary on his life was released earlier this month. Clean and sober for more than a year, he also has a part in the upcoming comedy *The Hangover*, where he gets laughs singing a song and punching out one of the main characters.

He seemed to be finally putting some of his demons behind him, to the relief of those who never thought he would make it this far. He wasn't at strip clubs every night, and could go to a restaurant without having a drink. He was finding a new identity outside the ring.

And now he's faced with every parents' worst nightmare. People will offer their sympathy, but not everyone will be so sympathetic. A changed man or not, he's still reviled as the fighter who once bit off a piece of Evander Holyfield's ear and threatened to eat Lennox Lewis' children.

But he's also a man who talked often about his own children, and how he wished he could have had a father when he was growing up. I remember watching him playfully nibble on his infant son's arm on the podium at a press conference days before his fight with Clifford Etienne, so engrossed with the baby that he seemed oblivious to everything else.

Indeed, Tyson has been a walking contradiction most of his life. I saw him bite Holyfield's ear and try to break Francois Botha's arm, but I also remember times he would knock someone senseless and then try to help him up.

Sadly, there's no kiss that can bring back his daughter.

He was once young and ferocious, hated by many and feared by all. But that was a lifetime ago.

Now he's simply Mike Tyson, grieving father.

Associated Press

Adventurers flush with pride at end of epic journey

Melanie Ho

Hong Kong's Bruce Walker was so excited to cross the finish line in RacingThePlanet: Namibia 2009, he ran completely through it, forgetting to stop and collect his medal.

Derek Kwik, another of the 63 Hong Kong competitors, took photographs at the finish line, the very last banner on the 250km course. Lucy Marriott, who sprinted the final 8km, craned her neck as she anxiously awaited her husband, Frank, to complete the race.

As the seven-day, six-stage, 250km footrace in the Namib Desert came to a close last Sunday in the small coastal town of Luderitz, there were hugs, tears and camera flashes. Almost everyone wanted to eat pizza and drink cold Windhoek Lager at 10am.

In the end, Spain's Salvador Calvo Redondo narrowly beat South African Ryan Sandes for the overall title. The United Kingdom's Lucy Hilton finished fourth overall and first in the ladies' division.

Of the 213 starters who began the first stage of the race, 167 finished all six of them. The top Hong Kong

When Lucy said she was going to do this, I knew she would finish, but I had no idea just how tough the race would be

Sir David Tang admires his wife's determination to complete the gruelling 250km race in the Namib Desert

Lady Lucy Tang, Annabelle Bond and Sissel Smaller are all smiles as they approach the end of the race. Photo: Ian Taylor/RacingThePlanet Ltd

competitors were Aird Rowley (12th) and Felix Shum Yiu-fai (18th).

Shum was calm and collected as he finished the race. A day earlier, as he sat at the final campsite overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, he commented on the scenery.

"It's very beautiful, very special when you are on the sand dunes and running towards the ocean," Shum said. "The race has been constant transitions. From the dry to the humid, from the daylight to racing at night for 100km where for seven hours I only saw my own headlight."

Such were some of the challenges of the race. Others included the physical and mental fatigue, the pain of blisters and swollen feet. Many suffered from nausea. Others didn't sleep well or were too exhausted to eat and refuel.

"It's the hardest thing I've ever done," Lucy Marriott said of the race that traversed the Fish River Canyon and the Skeleton Coast, among other locations. "I was so happy to see that finish line. I sprinted the entire 8km because I just wanted it to be over and done with."

Hong Kong police superintendent Barry Smith referred to the entire week as an emotional roller

coaster. "It's a real test," Smith said. "Every day you need to dig just a little bit deeper just to keep your feet moving forward."

Lady Lucy Tang understood that sentiment. Having never completed even a marathon before, Tang competed in a team with two friends, Sissel Smaller and Annabelle Bond. Tang, who suffered from particularly painful feet during the race, walked through the finish line as if in a daze.

"I'm so glad I did this," Tang said. "There's this really rewarding feeling of just being finished."

A moment later, she caught the eye of her husband, Sir David Tang, who had flown to Namibia to greet her. From a paper bag, he pulled out a plastic container of treats. After surviving on little more than freeze-dried food and energy gels for the past week, Tang gobbled biscotti while Bond was particularly enthusiastic about the wine gums on offer.

"When Lucy said she was going to do this, I knew she would finish, but I had no idea just how tough the race would be. I burst into tears when I read about the 100km. I'm very, very proud of her," said Sir David.

