

Glendale Raptors Represent U.S. At Rugby World Cup

by Marco Cummings

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

Two Glendale Raptors are representing club and country this month during the 2015 Rugby World Cup in England.

Glendale Raptors Zach Fenoglio and Niku

Kruger were among the names selected to the 31-man USA World Cup roster. The USA Eagles are competing alongside 20 other nations during the six-week tournament.

"Making the World Cup squad truly is a dream come true. It was something I set



Photo by Seth McConnell
Glendale Raptors Captain Zach Fenoglio training with the USA Eagles at InFINITY Park.



Glendale Raptors Hooker Zach Fenoglio is representing the U.S. at the Rugby World Cup in England.

my sights on five years ago and it is surreal to see those goals met now," Fenoglio said of his selection. "When you first start playing rugby you always imagine what it would be like to play on the World Cup stage and now to have this opportunity is something I'll cherish forever."

"Zach has been a hard worker since his initial selection onto our A side (lower-



Newcomer Niku Kruger playing for the U.S. at the Rugby World Cup will join the Glendale Raptors for the 2016 Spring Pacific Rugby Premiership season.

level Eagle) three years ago. Despite some disappointing squad omissions, Zach continued to remain positive in his approach, and eventually he became a regular squad member for us," said USA Eagles head coach Mike Tolkin. "His leadership role with the Raptors has helped him become a confident player with the Eagles.

International play will give Fenoglio, a Denver native and longtime Raptor, time to mesh with Kruger, who will be a new addition to Glendale's roster.

"I chose Glendale because of the professionalism and culture the club has. I have followed Glendale for a couple of years and really enjoyed the way they played and presented themselves," Kruger explained. "Then when I spoke to coach Andre [Snyman] and learned of his love and enthusiasm for the game I knew it was the place I wanted to further my rugby career."

"It has been great getting to work with Niku, he's a very talented and knowledgeable player of the game," Fenoglio added. "It's been great seeing him develop with the Eagles and I know he'll bring great value and leadership to Glendale next season. Bringing someone with that talent and rugby background will only help grow and better our team."

Fenoglio and Kruger will look to defend the Raptors' Pacific Rugby Premiership (PRP) title in 2016, but are playing alongside several other PRP players as teammates for the Eagles.

"It is great to have these players return to their clubs and bring back the international experience they have gained," said Tolkin. "Their teammates look up to them and they help raise the bar on the field."

The pair are part of a USA team which features 20 World Cup debutants, but played several international matches in preparation for the Rugby World Cup.

"In terms of Rugby World Cup experience, yes, this is a relatively inexperienced group," USA Men's Eagles head coach Tolkin said. "However, while the Rugby World Cup is a whole different kettle of fish, many of these players do have a fair bit of international play under their belts since 2011."

He added, "[Kruger] was a late selection and has displayed talent as a young scrum-half. While he has not had much playing time this summer, his skill and work ethic promise well for him in the future."

Drawn in Pool B alongside opposing teams Samoa, Scotland, South Africa and Japan, the Eagles look to qualify for the Knockout Stage, a goal which has been out of reach in several prior World Cups.

"As a team we have really begun to come together and execute our systems effectively," said Fenoglio. "Our goal for the World Cup is to continue to develop our continuity on both sides of the ball and to make it into the round of 8, getting out of pool play. We have a very talented and committed group of guys and I know we can do it."

"As a player, I want to ensure that every time I step into that field I represent my country to the best of my ability and hard top quality rugby," added Kruger. "We want to make it to the knockout stages of the tournament."

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