



## **USA, Ireland Name Squads for Setanta Challenge Cup**

**Setanta Signs on as Title Sponsor for Third Consecutive Year**

SAN JOSE, CA. – The USA Men’s National Team and Ireland National Team have officially named their squads for the Setanta Challenge Cup on May 31 at Buck Shaw Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif.

The third annual Setanta Challenge Cup kicks off the Eagles international season as it faces the reigning RBS 6 Nations and Grand Slam Champions, Ireland, and marks former Ireland head coach Eddie O’Sullivan’s first match at the helm of the USA Eagles.

“It is great to be back coaching at international level again and I’m looking forward to the challenge immensely. It is also an honor to face Ireland in my first test as Eagles Head Coach. It will be a little strange to face off against a team that I know so well, but at the same time for me that will make the occasion even more special,” Eagles Head Coach Eddie O’Sullivan said.

O’Sullivan named his squad off the heels of his first training camp with the domestic players last weekend (May 8-10). The U.S. squad for this match and the subsequent test against Wales on June 6 includes a fairly even split of experience and youth in the forward pack.

Led by the USA’s 2007 Rugby World Cup props Mike MacDonald and Mate Moeakiola, the forwards include six new players to the Eagles side, while 2007 RWC players John Van der Giessen and Louis Stanfill also return to lead the locks and loose forwards, respectively. Due to injury and unavailability, O’Sullivan has only been able to name one hooker and one scrum-half in the pool. The second hooker and scrum-half will be named early next week after reviewing this weekend’s Super League performances.

In the back line, the U.S. has a little more experience with just four uncapped players with the Eagles XV side and five players who played in the 2007 RWC. Namely Mike Hercus, Mike Petri, Takudzwa Ngwenya, Chris Wyles and Salesi Sika all return to give the Eagles’ back line a threatening edge.

“Despite the unavailability of 13 players, I believe we have still assembled a very competitive squad, with a good balance of youth and experience,” O’Sullivan added. “With seven games ahead in as many weeks there is no doubt that the depth of our playing pool will be tested to the limit. Ireland is the first step on the road and judging by the energy and intensity displayed at our Denver training camp last weekend, the players are fired up for our first test of the season.”

The Ireland squad named for this upcoming match will be captained by Rory Best and also shows a mixture of youth in addition to a strong spine of experience. The Irish team will play two international test matches in their tour to North America, one each against Canada and the USA.

With Leinster qualified for the Heineken Cup final on May 23, the same day as the test match against Canada, and 13 players travelling to South Africa with the British & Irish Lions, as well as any possible replacements being called up, the Ireland tour provides an opportunity for players to put themselves in the frame for next season, bringing 12 uncapped players along on tour.

“When we confirmed the tour back in January, we were always hopeful some of the provinces and players would be involved in the Heineken or Challenge Cup finals and we would also be without any players selected for the British & Irish Lions tour,” Ireland Coach Declan Kidney said. “We felt that it would be a chance for the national management to work closely with a larger pool of players than we would normally do during the season and for players to come through at this level. We are continuing to try and build a squad and this tour is a real chance for players to stake a claim for the November games and next years championship.”

While several players are being rested for the tour, 12 capped players are also named in the travelling party with Peter Stringer, Bob Casey, Eoin Reddan, Mick O’Driscoll and Denis Leamy among those lending their considerable experience for the tour.

“The number of experienced players we are bringing is important as we will have two strong oppositions on consecutive weekends to deal with and while there will be new caps during the tour, it is important that they come through while making it a positive experience. We obviously want to win both games, but it is a balancing act trying to do that while exposing players and new combinations to test match level,” Declan Kidney continued.

“This is our first tour together and with many players not available, it does add another unknown element to it against the backdrop of starting the tour off by playing a Canada side certainly looking to get one over us after last years game.”

The showdown between the USA and Ireland will begin at 1:00 p.m. (PST). Tickets start at just \$10 and are on sale at [www.tickets.com](http://www.tickets.com) or 1-800-225-2277.

“One of our goals was to increase the number of international opponents in order to make our National Teams more competitive,” USA Rugby’s CEO and President of Rugby, Nigel Melville said. “This schedule is a very good step forward in many respects. We are playing stiff competition against top international sides, which is really the only way to gauge our development. And with the increased amount of matches across the U.S., as well as the number of games being broadcast, this is a great opportunity for fans to get behind the Eagles and create some momentum.”

Regionally, interest and participation in rugby has steadily increased in recent years, with more than 100 clubs located throughout California.

“Our community is thrilled to welcome USA Rugby back to the Silicon Valley for this premier match against international power-house Ireland,” said Patricia Ernstrom, executive director at the San Jose Sports Authority. “Rugby fans are in for a wonderful afternoon of intense rugby, camaraderie, and fun and we are thankful for the tremendous support from our partners at Santa Clara University and the San Jose Earthquakes to host this great event. San Jose has an active sister city affiliation with Dublin, Ireland, and we are excited build on this international relationship and goodwill through sport.”

Director of Setanta Sports, Robert Ryan added, “Setanta Sports is very pleased to be supporting the third consecutive Setanta Challenge Cup, which for the first time brings national team opponents in the form of reigning grand slam champions, Ireland. We look forward to a great match.”

For media interested in attending the event or for more information on the U.S. Team, please contact USA Rugby's Communication Director Sara John at [sjohn@usarugby.org](mailto:sjohn@usarugby.org). For more information on the Ireland squad, please contact IRFU Communications & Media Manager Karl Richardson at [karl.richardson@irfu.ie](mailto:karl.richardson@irfu.ie).

### **U.S. Eagles Squad:**

**Forwards:** Chris Biller (California), Peter Dahl (Belmont Shore RFC), Pat Danahy (Dublin University FC), J.J. Gagiano (Univ. Cape Town), Nic Johnson (Denver Barbarians RFC), Will Johnson (Oxford University), Scott Lavalla (Dublin University FC), Mike MacDonald (Leeds Carnegie RFC), Courtney Mackay (Counties Manukau), Mate Moeakiola (Park City Haggis), Samu Manoa (San Francisco Golden Gate RFC), Shawn Pittman (Bayside RFC), Hayden Smith (Saracens FC), Louis Stanfill (New York Athletic Club Rugby), John Van Der Giessen (Denver Barbarians RFC)

### **Backs:**

Justin Boyd (Dallas Harlequins RFC), Gavin DeBortolo (Eastern Suburbs Rugby), Taivalu Enosa (Tempe Rugby Football), Mike Hercus (Sunshine Coast Stingrays), Ata Malifa (Belmont Shore RFC), Takudzwa Ngwenya (Biarritz Olympic), Mike Petri (New York Athletic Club Rugby), Salesi Sika (Sporting Agen), Lotomau Junior Sifa (Middleton RFC), Roland Suniula (Pearl City Rugby), Kevin Swiryn (Old Puget Sound Beach RFC), Alipate Tuilevuka (Provo Steelers), Chris Wyles (Saracens FC)

### **Not considered due to injury:**

*Matt Hawkins (Belmont Shore RFC), Valenese Malifa (Belmont Shore RFC), Alec Parker (Gentlemen of Aspen), Rikus Pretorius (Olympic Club Rugby)*

### **Considered but unavailable:**

*Todd Clever (Golden Lions), Paul Emerick (Overmach Parma), Troy Hall (Old Blue RFC), Brian Lemay (Boston Irish Wolfhounds RFC), Mike Palefau (Las Vegas RFC), Thretton Palamo (San Francisco Golden Gate RFC) Euan Sadden (Old Blue RFC), Kort Schubert (Olympic Club Rugby), Matt Wyatt (New York Athletic Club Rugby)*

### **Ireland Squad:**

Rory Best (Belfast Harlequins/Ulster) - Captain, Tony Buckley (Shannon/Munster), Ryan Caldwell (Dungannon/Ulster), Bob Casey (London Irish), Darren Cave (Belfast Harlequins/Ulster), Tom Court (Malone/Ulster), Sean Cronin (Buccaneers/Connacht), Ian Dowling (Shannon/Munster), Gavin Duffy (Galwegians/Connacht), Chris Henry (Ballymena/Ulster), Denis Hurley (Cork Constitution/Munster), Ian Keatley (Galwegians/Connacht), Denis Leamy (Cork Constitution/Munster), Keith Matthews (Buccaneers/Connacht), John Muldoon (Buccaneers/Connacht), Barry Murphy (U.L. Bohemians/Munster), Niall O'Connor (Belfast Harlequins/Ulster), Mick O'Driscoll (Cork Constitution/Munster), Eoin Reddan (London Wasps), Niall Ronan (Shannon/Munster), Mike Ross (Harlequins), Donnacha Ryan (Shannon/Munster), Peter Stringer (Shannon/Munster), Bryan Young (Ballymena/Ulster).

### **About Setanta Sports**

Setanta Sports operates the only dedicated international sports channel in America. In 2009, the 24-hour TV network will air more than 1,000 live events, including European and international soccer, such as the Barclays Premier League, UEFA Champions League, FA Cup, World Cup Qualifiers and the Carling Cup plus world-class rugby and other sports programming designed to meet the growing demands of international sports fans. Setanta Sports is owned by Dublin-based Setanta Sports Holdings, a leading international pay television broadcaster in the UK, providing top sports leagues and events to more than 100 million digital television homes globally and to commercial venues in six countries. [www.setanta.com/us](http://www.setanta.com/us)

### **About the San Jose Sports Authority**

*The San Jose Sports Authority is a non-profit organization whose mission is to increase the City of San Jose's economic development, visibility and civic pride through sports. Serving as the City's sports commission since its inception in 1991, the Sports Authority has provided leadership and support to attract or host nearly 200 sporting events in San Jose and the South Bay. The Sports Authority also supports and operates community, youth and amateur sports programs, including the San Jose Sports Hall of Fame, The First Tee of San Jose, and the REACH Youth Scholarship Program. To learn more, visit [www.sjsa.org](http://www.sjsa.org).*

*About USA Rugby*

*USA RUGBY, founded in 1975, is the national governing body for rugby and is a member of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and the International Rugby Board (IRB). The organization is responsible for the development of boys, girls, high school, collegiate and club rugby programs, as well as the nation's rugby coaches, referees, administrators and all of its national teams that represent the U.S. in international competitions. As part of this development, USA Rugby hosts a number of courses, clinics, National Championship events and international matches throughout the year. For more information, please visit [www.usarugby.org](http://www.usarugby.org).*