

Hong Kong, China Men's Sevens lose Gold medal match to Japan



[Hong Kong, 6 December 2009] Japan edged Hong Kong 26-24 in a thrilling Men's Gold medal match at the 2009 East Asian Games in Hong Kong this afternoon. In the Women's competition, China continued its run of impressive results beating Japan 34-12 in the Gold medal match to finish the competition undefeated.

The Japan Men's Seven reached the Gold medal final despite suffering a surprise 14-12 defeat to China in their penultimate preliminary match this morning. Japan's undefeated opening day was enough to see them through to the final despite the loss and they were ruthlessly efficient with a 41-7 win over Guam in the final round robin match.

Hong Kong reached the final the hard way, beating both Korea and China, (ranked 2nd and 5th respectively in Asian Sevens), to get their chance at Gold. Despite jumping out to a 21-0 lead at halftime, Korea nearly spoiled Hong Kong's party as they fought all the way back to 21-19 before the clock ran down on their comeback effort. The loss left Hong Kong with one last hurdle, China, on their hunt for gold. Again, Hong Kong jumped out to a wide lead at halftime but this time they were more clinical in the second half, winning 21-7 to send China to the Bronze Medal match alongside Korea.

In the Gold Medal match, Japan jumped out to an early lead through a nice individual effort from Yusaku Kuwazuru in the corner to edge the visitors to a 5-nil lead. Hong Kong centre Rowan Varty replied minutes later with his own corner try. Both conversions were missed to bring the score to 5-all. The early interchange set the tone for the match, which saw the scores seesaw back and forth until literally the last second of the game.

Japan's Masahiro Tsuiki was the next to break the deadlock with a try beneath the sticks to bring Japan ahead 12-5. The lead was again short-lived as Rowan Varty crossed for his second try of the first half, this time under the posts, this time for an easy conversion to bring the score to 12-all at the interval. The excitement picked up where the first half left off as the early portion of the final stanza saw both sides test each other's defence but the lines were holding strong. Eventually, Japanese pivot Manase Folau broke the stalemate, breaking away for a nice try that was converted to put Japan back in the lead, 19-12.

The score remained 19-12 until two minutes left in the final when pacy Hong Kong winger Adam Raby broke free down the sideline to dot down in the corner and bring Hong Kong back within striking distance at 19-17. The conversion attempt was unsuccessful, leaving Hong Kong adrift before Anthony Haynes crashed over the line with less than a minute remaining to bring the score to 24-19 with the conversion. A vocal crowd thought the score would stand but the cool heads and disciplined professionals in the Japan Sevens team never said never and with three seconds left Masahiro Tsuiki broke free of the defence in midfield and crossed over for a hero's try, leveling the scores at 24-all. The simple conversion in front of the posts by Yamamoto sealed victory 26-24 and brought the Gold medal home to Japan.

Japan coach Wataru Murata said, "My heart was pounding as the game was so tight, but I'm very happy. Hong Kong is the home team and had great crowd support, but our team is very disciplined. We have a lot of Japanese pride and that was the difference in those final five seconds. It is great to have Rugby Sevens as part of the East Asian Games."

Hong Kong National Coach Dai Rees said: "Credit to the guys, they played exceptionally well. Five of our players were marking their debut playing inside the Hong Kong Stadium and we were leading against a team almost primarily full of professionals. It has been a great experience for the team and we are extremely thankful for the brilliant support we have gotten from the crowd. The reaction really proves that Rugby Sevens is a great competition for multi-sport Games."

Hong Kong forward Mark Wright was disappointed but took positives from the experience. "We are gutted by the loss of course but the guys played exceptional rugby throughout the tournament, especially in the final. We're disappointed not to win, but we are very pleased with the Silver. Back at the Asian Games in 2006, we were playing for fifth place and here we are not just playing for Gold but leading with just seconds left. We will take a lot from this."

A strong crowd of nearly 11,000 people attended today's competition proving the attraction of Rugby Sevens as a competition sport at multi-sport games. The 2009 East Asian Games is the fifth instalment of the East Asian Games and the first to feature Rugby Sevens as a competition sport, which is entirely fitting considering the Games are being hosted in Hong Kong, home of the world famous Hong Kong Sevens.

Hong Kong, China Men's Sevens Squad for the 2009 East Asian Games:

Name	Club
Simon LEUNG Ho Yam	HKCC
KWOK Ka Chun	Kowloon
Mark WRIGHT	HKFC
Anthony HAYNES	Newcastle University / HKFC
Jeff WONG, Chun Kiu (C)	Kowloon
FAN Shun Kei	DeA
Keith ROBERTSON	DeA
Rowan VARTY	DeA
Adam RABY	HKFC
YIU, Kam Shing	Valley
Benjamin HO Tsz Chun	DeA
TSANG Hing Hung	DeA