

Hamburg 7's, the 40th edition



It was the night before the tournament and all through Hamburg town there were naked bus sing-alongs and burly lycra clad men scrumming down. Yes the quite frankly superb 40th edition of the Hamburg Sevens tournament took place on the 14.05.2016. And what an atmosphere the fans and players brought to Hamburg, in this, the 50th year of the Hamburg Exiles RFC. Each and every of the sixteen teams involved making quality contributions to the days entertainment and good fun was had by all.

The tournament was arranged into four pools of four teams, with each pool playing a mini-league, the winner of which went into the semi-finals. The semi-finals were La French vs Ealing 1's and the Hun's vs The Berlin Grizzlies. Berlin and Ealing won their semi-finals to set up a Berlin vs Ealing final and a Rotterdam vs La French plate game.

In the final the Ealing, perhaps hindered by a long and arduous Friday night, could not quite keep up with the tempo the Grizzlies brought to the game. The Grizzlies, fielding a strong, fit international squad, including Australian ex-Exile Sam; played in the final with the same form that saw them unbeaten throughout the tournament and the Berlin Grizzlies were the winners, securing the Cup as winners the 40th Hamburg Sevens Tournament.



A pick and go in the rain for Berlin Grizzlies Number 9 during the final against Ealing

The third place in the tournament and the Plate was a contest between “La French” (a team of Frenchmen, many of them current Exiles) and The Hun. The Hun’s finest were overrun by La French in the first half. La French ran in three well worked, but unconverted tries. The Hun however, was far from beaten. They got a quick converted try from the second half restart and then, after applying significant pressure got another converted try with three minutes left on the clock. These final, hectic minutes saw La French absorbing a lot of pressure, and holding strong, meaning that they secured the plate and treated all the guests to a heartfelt rendition of “La Marseillaise” at the presentation.



Bebert, of La French, skipping past another attempted tackle in the semi final

The tournament was a wonderfully entertaining for everyone involved (Big Exiles love to chief organiser Markus Könniker, main helpers Danny, Basti, Basti, Tjark, Kai, Stuart, Mike, Fred & all others). Good food and drink was served with a smile though-out the day, some fantastic and some entertaining rugby was played. There were lots of good songs sung and many new friends made. The Exiles have to thank all the teams who travelled for the festivities. Special mentions go to Rotterdam’s 50 monks and nuns, and their Crucifix, the boisterous Englishmen of Ealing and the Grizzly boys from Berlin who outplayed us all.

The day’s competition was officially ended with the traditional boat race. Specially selected crews of five men, one from each squad involved, took place in this age old competition of skill, bravery and perseverance. With many of the crew’s unknown on this course the race was unpredictable. However, Rotterdam Thirds looked to have a shout, sporting a very experienced boat. Ladies favourites, La French’s, boat was also one to watch as they included some dab hands from a recent HSV victory. The reigning champions Front Row club were of course a big presence and took a prime position next to the huge crowd who had gathered to see the boats set off by Exile coach Michael Smith. The race itself has become a bit of a blur for the spectators and competitors we could interview however, video analysis shows that several of the boats were neck and neck going into turn four. It was at this point when Nils and Markus, of the Front Row club, took their turns; and what turns they were. With the crowd cheering them on these two powered through, leaving the competition in their wake. Victory was secured by at least half a length, almost unheard of in such a large field. In securing victory the Front Row Club crew, and supporters burst into their traditional ABC victory song.



The boat race in full swing...

So yes, when the time comes the Exiles are very much looking forward to extending an invitation to everyone for next year's (bigger and better) tournament.

The Exiles family also truly outdid themselves this year, not only by bringing great music, merchandise and beer but by putting three(ish) playing teams onto the field. Each of the teams had their level of success on the pitch; in the following their days at the sevens are reported further...



The Exiles; played some exciting rugby, with Phillip in particular playing inventively and scoring some fantastic tries. The team even successfully managed to have no tries scored against them in one half of their pool game against the eventual tournament winners The Berlin Grizzlies (just don't ask about the other half). Despite winning their final pool game The Exiles unfortunately did not quite have enough on the day to get out of their very tough pool group

and managed to maintain the polite, long standing tradition of not winning their own tournament.



Exiles talk tactics at half time

Front Row Club was by far the most popular team of the day, with pretty much everyone getting pitch side to support them in each of their games. The Front Row Club did not disappoint, with their flag flying high these pink elephants skipped or waltzed their way into our hearts at the start of each game. On the pitch they delivered a well thought out, technical game plan, kick for field position, win set pieces and, most of all, ROLLING MAULS! When this game plan worked out there was very little which could stop them, many a Front Rower was seen being brought down by three of the opposition and sometimes even this was not enough. Unfortunately, what could not be prevented was the opposition spreading it wide and cheekily using that “little bit of extra pace” to get around the side of the defence. The lads of the Front Row Club fought bravely in all their pool games but couldn’t quite get any further.



Juan, of the Front Row Club, unsuccessfully trying to set up a rolling maul

La French (The French); organised by Exile Alban and made up of a strong core of Exile players, with other expat Frenchies from Hamburg completing the squad. They were, of course, the prettiest team to watch on the day, great hands running good lines and putting together smooth interchanges. La French won all of their pool games and sauntered into a semi-final against the impressive Ealing.

Unfortunately, hindered by a huge downpour in the first half, La French found Ealing to be a very physical team, not quite so easily fooled by the dummies or switch plays, and with a massive defence. Despite the constant pressure La French just could seem to break through. Ealing managed to grind out one, unconverted, try in the first half and then La French put the pressure back on. But, Ealing held strong and got the 0 – 5 victory. Losing in the semi-final did mean a place in the Plate final and the potential consolation of the third place prize. In the Plate final La French did manage to bring their open style into play, breaking down their opponents and securing a good win and a fine trophy at the end of the day.

Written by Ben Matlock.

