

Greenstone Hook July 2007 Paris Report

Esther Mandl, an Austrian student from Ried, had never seen a rugby ball at the start of 2007. But on Sunday July 22nd she was holding up the Womens Touch Rugby Champions Trophy as part of the German Womens Touch Rugby team - in of all places, Paris. She along with Sascha Stranksy and Dan Travers of the Rugby Club Stade Viennios (RCSV - Touch Rugby section), were invited to join the German National Touch Rugby squads to compete in the 4th Greenstone Hook International Touch Rugby Tournament held in Paris in July 2007.

Mens, Womens and mixed teams from major Rugby nations Wales, France and Scotland and also from non-rugby nations Germany, Belgium, Geurnsey and Switzerland took part in this Tournament over 2 days. The level of Touch rugby played was very high and at an incredibly fast pace (no stoppages!), as never seen before in Austria. It was proper Touch Rugby according to the International Rules - not just rugby without tackling - and the tactics and strategies were very different to rugby, although each game was full of switch passes, side-steps, wrapping, skip passes, dummy passes, sprinting through defensive gaps and pre-planned maneuvers. One Welsh team was comprised of hardened 20-year rugby veterans who now played Touch Rugby to avoid injury but played the flowing exciting running game often associated with Welsh rugby backline play. There was also a large proportion of ex-patriate rugby mad New Zealanders, Australians, South Africans and English playing for many of the teams. The atmosphere was competitive but also very friendly with all teams mixing socially at the after parties.

4 years ago the first Greenstone Hook Touch Tournament was played in Grenoble (France) between 2 mixed teams from France and Germany. Its expansion to 16 teams from 7 countries this year in Paris reflects the rapid growth of Touch Rugby as a sport in Europe. And now Austria is a part of it all - and will aim to have a mixed Austrian National team in the 2008 Greenstone Hook Tournament in France.

The German womens team were well drilled and played excellently as a team, not just as individuals - and their quick substitution that kept fresh players on the field all the time was a key factor in their success in winning the Womens trophy. The first exercise that the German mens team did was to practice each others names - many of the German team met at breakfast a few hours before playing! The German mens team executed some very cool looking tries (which included dives!), but they lacked a cohesive defence, and very poor substitution meant they were always tired and that made it easy for the fast French players and well drilled Welsh teams to score.

Esther was superb on defence and used her great ball handling skills to distribute passes to some of the very fast German women players who would score. It must be stated that she is a success story from the RCSV run USI (Universitäts Sport Institut) Rugby course. She learnt the basics there and after a few months of training with the RCSV touch rugby section, she could contribute to the German Womens Touch teams success. Due to injury, Sascha could not play, but still went in order to learn and experience the higher level of Touch rugby. Dan played 2 games for the German mens team (scoring a try against Wales) and then twisted an ankle (again) and played no more.

All three players will be passing on the tactics and skills they learnt from the Tournament in the Vienna Touch rugby training sessions. Key lessons learnt by playing and watching the best teams were : Substitution (constantly subbing to keep players fresh), do the basics well (Driving STRAIGHT up the field, keeping the ball possession until the 4th Touch to make the defence always run backwards without stopping and THEN doing the fancy passing stuff), Defence (working as a team and drifting) and the "Dump and Scoot" (a tactic for scoring when you are close to the try-line).

