



BUFFALO AND OLD BLUE IN UNDEFEATED CLASH

By Alex Goff | 10.20.12

It matters.

Buffalo and Old Blue have clinched playoff places in the Empire DI club league, but they play this weekend with a mind to finishing 1st.

Neither team is going to think 2nd is good enough.

"We know Old Blue will be a tough opponent, but we are excited to play them," said Buffalo captain Danny Ryan. "We have not had very many perfect seasons; we had one a couple of years ago in DII, so our guys are excited to play for an undefeated season."

"Finishing first in the new Empire Union has been our goal from onset of the season," added Old Blue club president Quentin Unsworth. "By no means are we taking Buffalo lightly. This weekend's match ought to be a good test."

Old Blue has done well despite being without two of their most dangerous backs, Luke Hume, who is playing 7s with the USA team, and Ashley Moeke, who is playing in New Zealand this fall. Still, they have a tough, hard-nosed, and talented team that has adjusted well to life with no Super League.

For Buffalo, the jump to elite status is a bit more of a surprise. They did add a large number of new players, most of them with good rugby experience.

"That has made fighting for those starting DI spots really competitive," said Ryan. "When we have had injuries, we have been lucky enough to pull someone up from DII and fill in without missing a beat. Another benefit we have had is that the core group of guys that make up the DI squad has been together now for about four years and we are really starting to gel and are comfortable with one another."

In addition, their DII team has been very strong and sits 3-3 in a tough Empire DII competition. This situation – of a successful DI club backed by success at DII has been repeated in Glendale, Colo., Minneapolis, and Boston.

Still, Buffalo was not the top dog in the Midwest last year, and now is among the top two in the Empire after switching to play against fellow New York teams.

Why is that? Ryan thinks it's because his club is used to very long road trips, and so what seem like long road trips for the Empire opponents are no big whoop for the players from the Nickel City.

"Our first side guys are used to long rides and have figured out over time what it will take to get fired up to play rugby after spending seven hours in a cramped van," said Ryan. "Having said that, we are aware that Old Blue is used to flying around the country to play rugby, so the trip up to Buffalo might not seem as daunting to them."

Nothing seems to faze Old Blue.

"We've had some lineup changes due to a few injuries over the season," said Unsworth. "Regardless, we are feeling good about our side and have added a number of quality players, notably Blake Creighton down from Boston. Overall the Fall has been good for the entire club. This weekend we are looking to wrap the Empire GU season the right way."