



PRESS RELEASE

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HSBC ASIAN FIVE NATIONS RUGBY TOURNAMENT **KICKS OFF SECOND YEAR**

HSBC Asia-Pacific CEO Sandy Flockhart, Asian Rugby Football Union President Choi Won Tae and England's Top Try Scorer Rory Underwood celebrate Growth of Asian Rugby

[Hong Kong, April 2, 2009]: HSBC and the Asian Rugby Football Union (ARFU) today launched the second year of the innovative HSBC Asian Five Nations Series (HSBC A5N). Sandy Flockhart, Chief Executive Officer of HSBC Asia-Pacific, ARFU President Choi Won Tae and Rory Underwood, England's leading try scorer, hosted today's press launch at the iconic HSBC Main Building in Hong Kong.

Mr Underwood, a former jet pilot and try-scoring ace, scored a record 49 tries for England from 85 caps (1984-1996) and won six caps for the British & Irish Lions. He played first class rugby at Leicester for a remarkable 14 years and was named a Member of the Order of the British Empire for his services to rugby. In parallel to his record-breaking rugby career, Mr Underwood amassed 18 years as a pilot in the Royal Air Force. With his Anglo-Malaysian ethnicity and incomparable sporting and professional career, he is the ideal rugby representative to help launch Year Two of this burgeoning Asian rugby series.

Mr Flockhart said: "We are excited to kick off Year Two of the HSBC A5N and are delighted with the continued growth in the competitiveness of the tournament and the spread of the game in the region. HSBC and the involved unions will place a premium on introducing more grassroots rugby elements across Asia during this season's HSBC A5N. Rugby reflects many of the key principles by which HSBC runs its business worldwide: leadership, integrity, perseverance and courage. The A5N also complements HSBC's growing profile of rugby sponsorship with our support as the principal sponsor of the HSBC British & Irish Lions. We look forward to what promises to be a momentous year for world rugby."

Emblematic of rugby's increasing profile in the region is the fact that ARFU welcomed its 26th associate member union, Jordan, in 2008. The Indonesia Rugby Football Union was admitted as an Associate Member of the International Rugby Board (IRB) and two other ARFU member unions, the Philippines and Pakistan, became full members of the IRB recently as well.

Reflecting this growth, the A5N series has expanded to include a new Division III competition that will be played in Manila in July amongst the Philippines, Guam, Indonesia and Iran. In total, the HSBC A5N features three levels of elite competition with promotion and relegation opportunities for participating teams. The three levels of competition are the Top 5, three divisional tournaments and three regional tournaments.

In 2009, A5N matches will be played across Asia from the United Arab Emirates to Uzbekistan, and in some of the region's legendary sports grounds. This year's venues include the storied Hanazono Rugby Stadium in Osaka, Japan; the Hong Kong Football Club, home of the Hong Kong Tens tournament; K-league ground Sunnam Stadium in Seoul, Korea; Almaty Central Stadium in Kazakhstan, venue for June's England v Kazakhstan World Cup 2010 football qualifier, and the newest showpiece for regional rugby, "7he Sevens", in Dubai, host venue of the Rugby World Cup Sevens 2009.



The Top 5 competition will again be played across a five-week, single round-robin home-and-away format featuring the defending champion Japan, runners-up Korea, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, and Singapore, the promoted team in 2009 as last year's Division I champion. Test matches will be held on five consecutive weekends from 25 April to 24 May.

Reflecting the tournament's official sanctioning by the IRB, selected matches will be branded as Rugby World Cup qualifiers. This year's Division I competition will be the official Rugby World Cup 2011 Qualifier as only the Top 5 teams in 2010 will be eligible for Asia's single direct spot at the next world championship. With the relegation rule in effect, the Top 5 matches will also serve as Rugby World Cup qualifiers as the relegated team will miss out the potential chance to play in New Zealand in 2011.

The promotion and relegation policy is also in effect for the Division II competition, while the newly formed Division III will be promotion only in 2009. The HSBC A5N promotion and relegation format is unique to international rugby tournaments of this calibre and guarantees an equal share of the spoils for Asia's most progressive unions, while bringing ARFU closer to its goal of having a clear playing pathway from the number 26 ranked union to the top ranked team.

With the sponsorship support from HSBC, ARFU has again been able to secure a television package to broadcast the event on ESPN Star Sports across Asia, including a Top 5 match of the week and a one-hour highlights programme. Last year's Top 5 matches were broadcast to nearly 120 million homes worldwide on Star Sports, Eurosport, Showtime Middle East, Sky New Zealand and JSports in Japan – an unprecedented level of awareness for Asian rugby.

Today's announcement marks the latest chapter in the long and distinguished history of rugby in Asia, the fastest growing region in world rugby. In the last 10 years, the membership of the ARFU has more than doubled from 10 unions in 1998 to today's 26, making Asia one of the hotbeds for growth in international rugby.

Notes to editor:

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited is the founding and a principal member of the HSBC Group which, with over 9,500 offices in 86 countries and territories and assets of US\$2,527 billion at 31 December 2008, is one of the world's largest banking and financial services organisations.

Asian Rugby Football Union (ARFU)

ARFU is the governing body of rugby in Asia under the authority of the International Rugby Board. Founded in 1968 by eight charter nations, the Union today has 26 member nations. The aim of ARFU has never changed: "to raise physical and moral standards in Asia by education in the healthy pursuit of Rugby Football and to promote friendship among Asian countries." ARFU also supports regional and pan-Asian tournaments, including women's, men's, and youth competition in both sevens and fifteen-a-side rugby.

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