



Greener Pastures

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A long-running Caribbean sevens tournament has made its way to **GRENADA** with the aim of kickstarting rugby on the Spice Isle



Beast Mode: Nigel Layne

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HEN KIRANI James raced home to win Grenada's first-ever Olympic medal with gold in the 400m at London 2012, an instant legacy was forged – that much was clear. What wasn't so transparent at the time was that a new sport, a decade on, would take its first fledgling steps inside the stadium renamed after him.

The second edition of the Grenada Rugby World 7s (GRW7s) – a name we can get on board with – took place in December last year.

Tournament organisers Brian Stollmeyer, son of the late West Indian cricketer

Jeffrey, and George Nicholson, who was appointed Rugby Americas North (RAN) president in 2021, brought the spectacle to the island for the first time in 2022.

In its previous guise, it took place in Barbados, having started out in Trinidad as far back as the 1980s. That makes it one of the longest-running club sevens competitions on Caribbean shores.

The latest version of the event took place at the Kirani James Athletics Stadium. After competing in exhibition matches over the road at the National Cricket Stadium in 2022, the Grenada Greenz played their first competitive →



Lunchtime entertainment



Atlantis celebrate their men's title

→ games just two years after the Grenada Rugby Union was established.

Having moved to the USA after his early childhood was spent on the island, Carrim Browne's interest in the sport stemmed from watching his younger brother play at the Las Vegas 7s. He picked up the game and a tour to New Zealand in 2017 cemented his love for it.

"I got to watch the All Blacks play and toured around to see all kinds of different world-class matches," he says. "In a short period of time, I was able to get involved in the rugby culture which ignited the fire even more within me."

Browne's stint with the Orlando Griffins left him wanting more and after failing to

Mode', one of two PR officers. A former bodybuilder and top-five finisher in Grenada's Strongest Man, the now 38-year-old came to rugby late but is one of its most ardent proponents after seeing a promotional flyer on Facebook and taking a chance he wouldn't regret.

"It just popped up," he tells RW. "There was nothing going on with strongman post-Covid, so I needed something to keep me motivated in the gym to keep training. I met a great group of guys.

"They are like brothers to me now! I'm really happy I made that move to sign up for the rugby team because I'd be upset today if I was in the stands when they were playing, thinking 'I could've done that'. Sometimes in life, you need to take a risk and you don't know what will happen... You may just turn out a local hero!"

A miraculous recovery from

a knee injury earned Layne the moniker Beast and it stuck. He's trademarked the phrase 'Beast Mode' in Grenada, which is the size of the Isle of Wight, and sells stickers, with a special one in store for the 50th independence anniversary on 7 February. T-shirts are next, but he's a busy man as a senior personal trainer and assistant manager in the gym, while also moonlighting as a photographer.

"Beast Mode is an inspirational movement because I used to be bullied in school," he explains. "I think that's why I've always wanted to compete at a high level in sport. I did bodybuilding and then strongman and now I play rugby. I want to be an ambassador for the sport in Grenada. It feels really good to be a strong voice for Greenz rugby."

He's certainly a personality. With a bench-press PB of 193kg, Beast is definitely more suited to the 15-a-side game, like his namesake and former South Africa prop Tendai Mtawarira.

"I could sniff that there was a potential love of the game in the Grenadian pupils"



The masquerade Jab Jab

find any sign of a Grenada team at RAN tournaments that he watched, he took things into his own hands. "I kept wondering why we weren't there. I knew we had high-level athletes on the island, but there was never any visible team internationally. I knew there was an opportunity there for me to make a difference on a whole new level."

An achilles injury convinced him the time was right to lay the foundations of the game on the island and he is now the GRU's first-ever president.

Sitting alongside Browne on the board is Nigel Layne, or 'Beast

DID YOU KNOW?

Grenada produces more than a dozen spices. They create 40% of the world's nutmeg, second only to Indonesia.



Beast carries it in for the Grenada Greenz



Grenada at the lineout

However, he is happy playing sevens for now and not even the discovery that his nickname has been taken in wider rugby circles can diminish the man's enthusiasm for his new-found sport.

Layne starred for the Greenz across the two-day tournament. Although, as expected, the array of teams from the UK, USA, Canada and across



The women's final

the Caribbean proved too strong come full-time, there was no greater noise in the stadium than when the home team went over for three tries in the real highlight of day one's action.

With \$20,000 of prize money in total, the weekend is not just about growing the game – there's some serious rugby.

Atlantis, an invitational side from the US, won the men's competition with victory over Misfits, who as the name



Carnival atmosphere

suggests were made up of players from different nations. Atlantis were aiming to do the double after their women made the final but Rugby Quebec put paid to those dreams with a 10-0 triumph.

Saturday's climax also featured some traditional lunchtime entertainment. The masquerade Jab Jab, a symbol of Grenadian culture and freedom where the enslaved retaliate against their slave owners, was the most striking performance.

Mark Lee, one of the GRW7s' organisers and retired director of rugby at Northampton School for Boys, Courtney Lawes's alma mater, took rugby sessions with local pupils to help them get to grips with the oval-ball basics.

"The natural athleticism of the boys and girls lends itself to the game," he says. "I could sniff there was a potential love of the game in the Grenadian pupils. They've got that basic enjoyment of running with the ball and at the end some said, 'Can we do this every week?'"

The 2024 competition on 6-7 December will come too soon for them, but they are promising signs indeed.

There's no shortage of reasons to head to the tri-island state. Grand Anse has been voted the best beach in the world by *CN Traveller*, and having been, we certainly couldn't argue.

"Good things come in small packages," adds Layne. "People come to Grenada and don't want to leave. Now adding rugby gives people even more reason to come." RAW



Rugby Quebec's women celebrate scooping the \$9,000 first prize against Atlantis