

Correspondence with English scrumhalf Emma Mitchell on the English preparation for the Final



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Did you specifically prepare for the US? Change your gameplan or did you stay the course?

The vast majority of the 1994 squad had stayed together since the loss to the USA in Cardiff in 1991. Over those three years we had grown tactically and technically (as well as becoming better conditioned for rugby) and, whilst always aiming to 'bring our game', we had also learned how to adapt to different opposition in terms of how and where was best to attack as well as defend.

We did have a specific game plan for the USA and this was designed by our team of coaches – Steve Dowling, Head Coach; Steve Peters and Steve Jew (Assistant Coaches with a focus on our set piece play). I vividly remembering sitting in a team meeting around the pool table in our hotel bar (we couldn't afford the cost of a meeting room) after our semi-final win against France and Steve said, the USA are an extremely good side and I know exactly how we are going to go about beating them. The whole group leaned in to hear what he then shared. The plan was detailed and clear – so clear that the key decision makers on the pitch hardly needed to speak to each other (which was unusual) – we all knew what to do where and why.

Scrum dominance:

we were confident that our pack would have the upper hand technically. We also knew that both US flankers were dropping off of defensive scrums (anticipating back row moves/Gill picking up), giving us an 8v6 advantage. We also felt that our pack had the technical control to keep driving the scrum forward and, if it collapsed, we would be re-awarded a scrum and could advance further. Plan B was to start using back row moves once the flankers were staying bound but they continued to drop off.

Line outs:

the Welsh had shown our coaches that the USA were struggling to defend driving mauls and that this option would be useful to us from some lineouts. We would most likely make decent territory and, as long as we were the side moving forward, we would be awarded the scrum (see 1). Gill Burns was an exceptional line out jumper in the pre-lifting era.

Defensive strategy:

we knew that the USA were looking to attack wide at every opportunity and our defensive plan was designed around this. From set-piece scrums and lineouts, our openside flanker, Genevieve Shore, was asked to run a hard line outside of Jos, essentially giving her the 'space/invitation' to step back in and be met by Gill Burs and Janis Ross. Rather than running my usual 'inside the ball line' from 9, I was told to sprint as fast as I could to the opposite try line corner - essentially using the side line as extra defence and, if nothing more, hoping to be a defender in the eyeline of the wider USA backs when they did go wide.

Our kicking game:

designed to win territory and secure lineouts, either from US clearances or backing ourselves with our defensive lineout options/driving mauls/scrums etc. Karen's kicking was exemplary that day - both for posts and to keep the score board ticking over and to secure us territory/clear our lines.

Attacking strategy:

the moves we ran were designed to tie in the midfield defence before going wide or attacking the blindside (Jane's try came from a kick-return counter-attack and use of the blindside). Our intent was always to maintain possession and win the next set piece award. We were not simply playing 10-person rugby and the full final footage shows how we varied our attack through our backs too. The USA backs' defence and organisation was strong and we definitely got the most return on our scrummaging.