

MORE THAN THE SEVENS

Photos and Text by Samantha Chung, Tiffany Ngai and So Lok Sin

While the Hong Kong Sevens is known for its charisma and excitement, the twelve men from this year's Hong Kong Rugby Sevens squad has shared both hardships and joy in order to shine in the stadium.

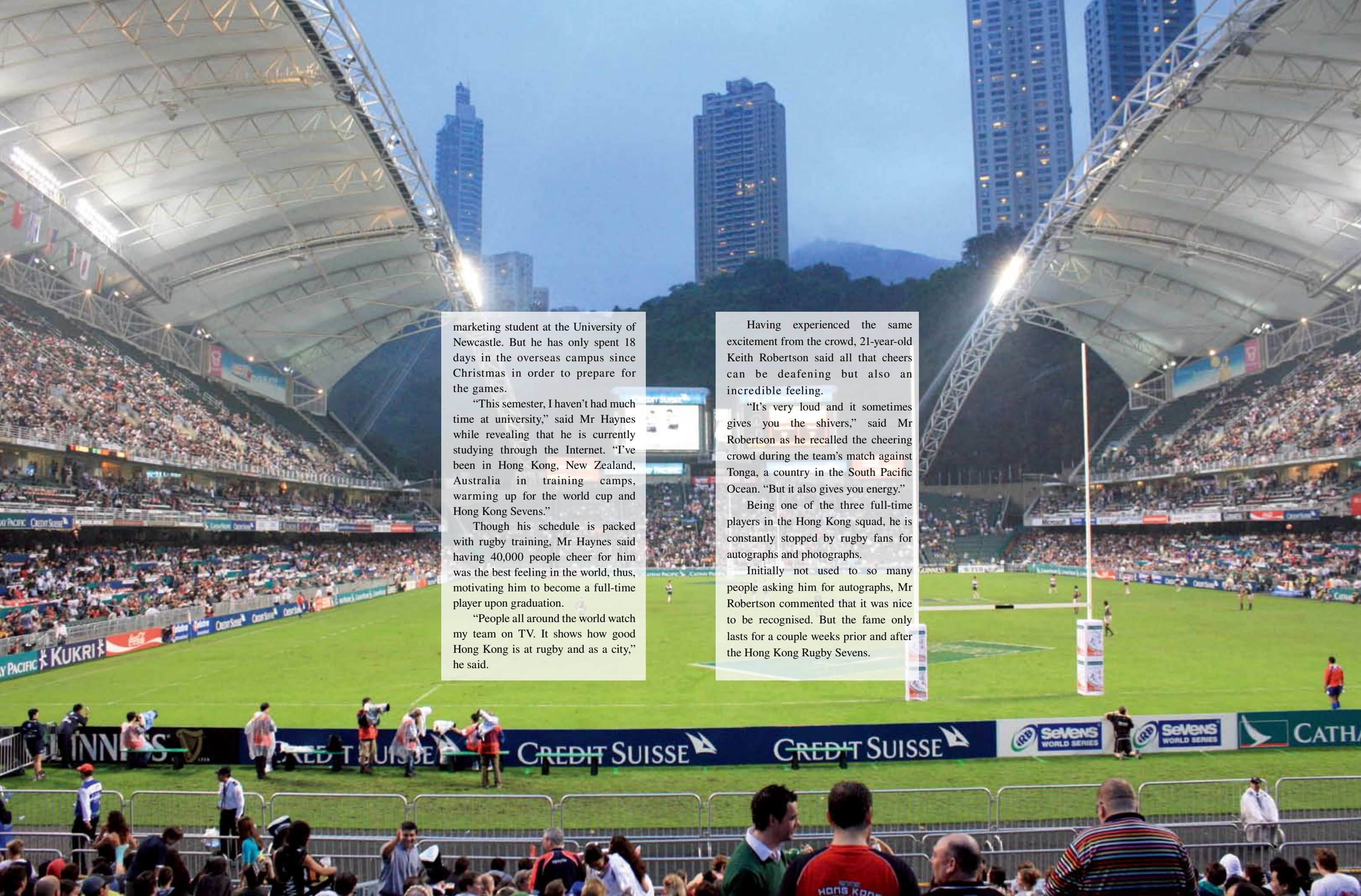
To get ready for big games such as the Hong Kong Sevens, the players train four to five times a week, with each session lasting for one to two hours.

Since only three of the twelve men are full-time rugby players, the nine others have to find time from their careers or study to take part in the demanding training schedule.

"It's quite hard especially like when I'm not under a contract or anything and the other guys got jobs," said 19-year-old Anthony Haynes. "So it's kind of hard to balance it, but you know, we have to put in the hard time for the big tournament."

Born in Hong Kong, Mr Haynes is currently a second-year business





marketing student at the University of Newcastle. But he has only spent 18 days in the overseas campus since Christmas in order to prepare for the games.

“This semester, I haven’t had much time at university,” said Mr Haynes while revealing that he is currently studying through the Internet. “I’ve been in Hong Kong, New Zealand, Australia in training camps, warming up for the world cup and Hong Kong Sevens.”

Though his schedule is packed with rugby training, Mr Haynes said having 40,000 people cheer for him was the best feeling in the world, thus, motivating him to become a full-time player upon graduation.

“People all around the world watch my team on TV. It shows how good Hong Kong is at rugby and as a city,” he said.

Having experienced the same excitement from the crowd, 21-year-old Keith Robertson said all that cheers can be deafening but also an incredible feeling.

“It’s very loud and it sometimes gives you the shivers,” said Mr Robertson as he recalled the cheering crowd during the team’s match against Tonga, a country in the South Pacific Ocean. “But it also gives you energy.”

Being one of the three full-time players in the Hong Kong squad, he is constantly stopped by rugby fans for autographs and photographs.

Initially not used to so many people asking him for autographs, Mr Robertson commented that it was nice to be recognised. But the fame only lasts for a couple weeks prior and after the Hong Kong Rugby Sevens.



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1. Mark Wright, captain of the Hong Kong squad, received minor injuries from their training session.
2. The Japan Rugby squad competed with the Hong Kong Rugby squad in a friendly match prior the Hong Kong Sevens.
3. The Hong Kong Rugby team continued their exercise routine, early in the morning, after their practise match with Japan.

On the Right Page:

Rowan Varty, in the dark blue jersey, practised at night with the rest of the team.



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“It’s like being a celebrity for a week,” said Mr Robertson.

Playing in front of the home crowd is also the happiest moment for 24-year-old Jeff Wong, who first represented Hong Kong at the Hong Kong Sevens in 2005.

“I had never been to the Hong Kong Sevens before I actually played in the game. So in the first time I took part, I was actually a player. It was overwhelming and something that I would remember for the rest of my life,” said Mr Wong.

Having dislocated his shoulder twice in the sport, Jeff Wong admitted that it is hard to go into a game with precautions, but basic equipment like mouth guards is a must.

“You can’t really prevent yourself from getting injured,” Mr Wong said.

“If it happens, then you got to deal with it.”

Even though he has accepted sport injuries as a given in rugby, he admitted that past injuries have once prevented him from going all out in competitions. But Mr Wong said he had forgotten all about his injuries and back in shape like they have never happened before.

As the only Chinese member of the final squad for the Men’s Hong Kong Sevens 2009, Mr Wong is relatively smaller in build. So it is important for him to be quick and agile to outsmart his competitors on the field.

“There are a lot of things we can do to make up for our disadvantages. For example, be more skilful, and play more to gain experience,” he said. “That’s probably our Asian disadvantage and so we work a little bit harder in

the gym to give us more physical strength to be able to compete with the Westerners.”

Aside from the rigorous training, eating healthily is another important part of preparing for the games. The players keep all greasy and oily foods off the menu and drink water and tea instead of soft drinks and alcohol.

Luckily, the eating ban does not last forever as Nick Hurrell, 28, revealed the team’s eating habits once the competition is over.

“When we are off season, when we have time off, we’ll have burgers, chips, lollipops and also alcohol,” said Mr Hurrell. “We just pig out, eat as much food and whatever we want, and then come back being overweight and we start training again to lose it all. So we are normal.”





But all that physical preparation would come to waste unless the team can fully adopt it to the field.

"I think we've got a pretty good attitude, we always try to fight till the last minute and we never give up," said Mr Hurrell, while explaining the team's advantage in the competition. "We play for each other and back each other up."


Support for each other sometimes turns into mischief as Mr Hurrell shares

how the team gets along outside of the field.

"We always play practical jokes on one another, all the time," said Mr Hurrell. "A lot of stuff, you wouldn't be able to report because it's not very nice," he joked when asked for further details.

Coming from different local rugby teams, these twelve men were specially picked by coaches from their schools or rugby clubs to undergo a special training programme in

order to be qualified for the Hong Kong team.

"Even though we are from different backgrounds and different age groups, when we come together, we do have a lot of fun," he said. "At the end of a camp or tournament, when we go back home and it's all really quiet, I miss all that fun. Even though it's a lot of work and fitness and things like that. At the end of it, it's actually pretty cool." 



On the Left Page:
Hong Kong Sevens in Action.

- Keith Robertson, in blue jersey, is tackled by players from Tonga, in red, while running to the goal with the ball.
- Support coming from Tom McQueen.
- 6-11. The tackling continued as the players tried to gain control of the ball.
12. The referee came in to call it a stop.

“It’s like being a celebrity for a week.”

- Everyone in the stadium cheers when Hong Kong won the round-robin pool competition against Tonga, this year's champion.
- The men from the Hong Kong squad lines up, after their match against Tonga, to autograph for their pouring fans.
- Kenzo Pannell signed on the arm of his young fan after one of the pool competition.





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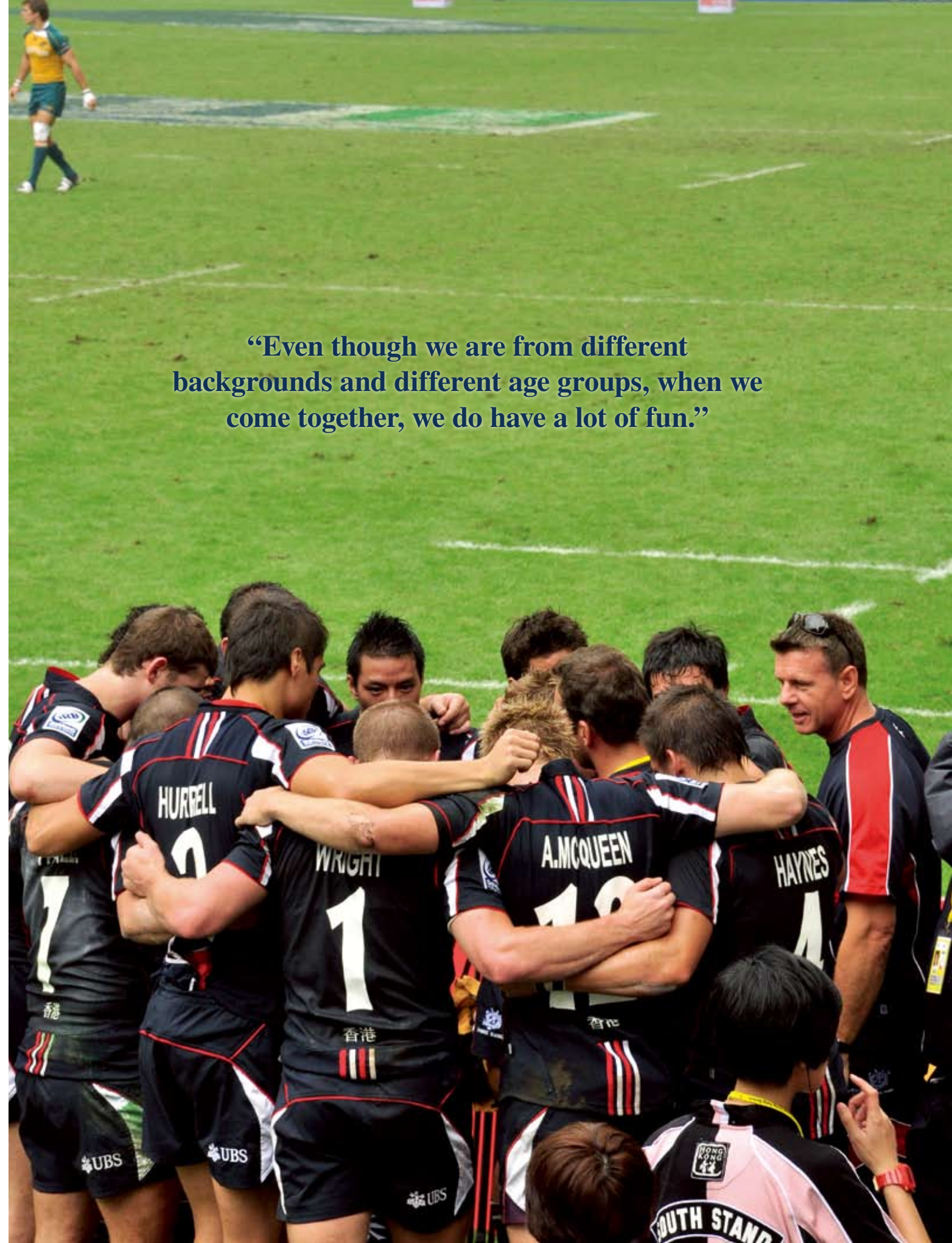
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- 16 With pens and paper ready, young fans waited for the autographs of the rugby players.
- 17. John Gbenda-Charles soaked himself in ice bath after a three hours training to relax his leg muscles.
- 18. Alex McQueen prepared a bottle of chocolate flavoured protein shake, a treat the 12 men enjoyed, after the rigorous training session.
- 19. Rowan Varty celebrated the team's victory against Tonga with his fans.

On the Right Page:
The twelve men in this year's Hong Kong rugby squad huddled after they lost against Portugal.



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