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ARMAGNAC BIGORRE: RUGBY'S EUROPEAN CAPITAL

From the 15th to the 24th of April, the Justin Bridou U18 European Championship will be played in the French region of Armagnac Bigorre: 28 nations, 40 matches, 41 referees, 40 commissioners, including an international one, the former Irish referee John WEST, a thousand persons or so involved. This event does deserve the title of the "greatest world competition for youth" as Jean-Claude BAQUÉ, who knows what he is talking about, said. Many elements support this statement: first of all, the age category, which is at a crucial stage for these future champions. The mix which will put together, for ten days, the elite of the VI Nations with the other national teams, giving these nations an opportunity to raise their level. This matches perfectly FIRA-AER's philosophy of "Training and Development". With, over all, the exceptional human dimension, which characterises this kind of event.

Twenty eight nations hosted by 28 clubs from two French rural departments (Gers and Hautes Pyrénées). A Territorial Committee which will have arranged general mobilization from its 56 clubs and 12390 registered players to put everything in place. This very demanding mission (150 volunteers will officiate on a full time basis) is also such a rewarding experience for those who give and those who receive! So demanding in terms of organisation, that so far, only France (4 times) and Italy (3 times) took the risk to host this event. And it is comforting and positive to hear that Spain has applied to host this competition in 2012, which is a real opportunity and opening to new horizons.

Armagnac Bigorre is to be the capital of European Rugby during this championship with, also, the holding of a meeting of the VI Nations Committee in Lourdes, as well as a meeting of the FFR board. That is to say a double recognition from two senior Rugby bodies! Then, the world of Rugby will meet in Europe as the IRB Junior World Championship will be hosted in Treviso, Italy where Jean-Claude BAQUÉ and Bernard LAPASSET met with the Italian Chairman Giancarlo DONDI for a preparatory meeting, a curtain raiser before the U18 event.

These two European and World events will give the Rugby family the opportunity to pay tribute and show our solidarity to our Japanese friends who, in a cruel coincidence, have just gone through a human and material disaster, that is even more serious than what happened in New Zealand.

HENRI GATINEAU



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