

EDITOR'S DESK

The best boxes at the 2008 Rugby Sevens

By The Editors, | 31 March 2008

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A veritable cornucopia of best box awards is up for grabs this year. The banks and securities houses laugh off the market misery and hope that free beer will ease their pain.

It's like the Masque of the Red Death.....As the markets swoon and jobs are lost, the carousing goes on.

The demographics of Hong Kong have been skewed over the past week with an influx of middle-aged white men – virtual strangers for the rest of the year who have been making token, and extremely brief, appearances in their local offices. Many have creatively concocted business trips that coincide with the rugby event.

At the preliminary rugby dinners earlier in the week, Hong Kongers were mortified at the sight of 40-something gweilo gentlemen dancing together, singing along with pride to *It's Raining Men*, in ebullient displays of bonhomie usually confined to the more bohemian districts of San Francisco.

To the Stadium....where getting in was worse than entering the former Iron Curtain. The gestapo working as front-house security were binning inflatable plastic hands that kids were trying to bring in, with no more explanation than "No, no, NO!". Shame on you Hong Kong Stadium for making kids cry. It's not illegal for children in a free society to carry an inflatable hand – irrespective of the slogan it carries.

The executive level greeted us with the usual flourish of themes, costumes and freebie handouts, but making our way between the investment bank boxes we also got a feeling that the party was somewhat less rowdy than in previous years. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that the coveted box passes were harder than usual to come by and that some boxes were only possible to get into if you were lucky enough to be on a pre-determined guest list. For people in the outdoor areas of the boxes, the absence of *Sweet Caroline* in between the games may also have played a role as there appeared to be less spontaneous dancing and singing going on this year. Inexplicably this long-term crowd favourite was played only once in two days.

In the spirit of change, we also decided to break with our usual format and issue more than one prize to give the investment banks due credit for their efforts and perhaps a brief moment of victorious ecstasy.

"The Temple of Doom Box" (subprime special) award

Runners-up were Merrill Lynch for the Mystic Golden Bull box (the kids loved the glittering Arabian Nights-inspired costumes), and UBS for its satanic Sevens Sins un-airconditioned box, set in the fires of subprime hell, with staff members dressed as cloaked Beelzebubs and Mephistopheleses.

The winner though is Citi for its interpretation of, coincidentally, Indiana Jones's Temple Of Doom with a box decked out as a semi-Khmer temple, complete with eyeball soup and decapitated monkeys. The Indiana Jones-style hats

became an instant hit as it offered a "cool" alternative to the baseball caps and sun hats handed out in other boxes. The impressive interior design was by Muse International.

"The Corinthian Sporting Box" award

As we entered the Goldman Sachs Barbarians' box, we were expecting to see Goldman Sachs staff luxuriating in bathtubs full of Kruger Rands, cackling like maniacs, lighting Havana cigars with thousand dollar notes.

Au contraire. The jolly good sports award goes to Goldman Sachs for their Olympian spirit.

Their box paid tribute to the bygone days of rugby past, in particular the team of "Barbarians" that won the very first Hong Kong Sevens. A dry stone fireplace, topped with a stag's head, quite possibly shot by Queen Victoria herself. The Goldmanites wore period rugby garb with tasselled velvet caps and were joined by Sir Clive Woodward – a player in the earlier mentioned Barbarian team but perhaps best known as a former English coach. A spokeswoman proudly pointed to the accoutrements of the box, several pieces of which she emphasised had been bought at flea markets.

It reminded one of prep school; play up, play the game, don't cry if you lose, Billy Bunter at Greyfriars.

"Most Raunchy Party Box" award

This goes to CLSA, for their ".....stays in Vegas" box. The pom-poms, the Yum-Yum girls, the Rio dancers, the DJ, that sheer volume of sweating testosterone and oestrogen permeating every cubic inch. There was a disco feel of 'maybe, just maybe, I could get lucky.....'

CLSA stuck perfectly to its classic script – a peerless box for the young at heart.

"The M&A Box" award

Not Bear Stearns; as they did not have a box. (On the black market, a Sevens ticket for one day went for the equivalent of 15 Bear Stearns shares).

No, the winner was ABN AMRO for its Da Vinci box. The bank had gone for complex dual-box theme with the first box modelled on the Mad Scientist, and featuring a Frankenstein's laboratory of gothic proportions. This was complemented by their Leonardo Da Vinci-Code box containing models of his (and other great men's) inventions.

ABN AMRO's spokesperson explained that the boxes were a metaphor for a seamless merger (note last year's takeover of the Dutch bank by Royal Bank of Scotland). Scientists coupled with Renaissance geniuses.

The neo-Scottish influence was also in evidence in the Simpson-twins bagpipers, the Scotch eggs and a selection of Glen Morangie malt whiskeys on offer. The Da Vinci box was not the best party box – as evidenced by the fact that the model of a Wrights brothers plane that hung from the ceiling was still hanging there at the end of Sunday – but rather had more of a Gentleman's Club feeling, (ideal for genteel Gentleman-journalists), and it was easy to simply stay there all day (pumping up the adrenalin with a few intermittent visits to party boxes).

The Editor's *Primus Inter Pares* award (that's Latin for first among equals)

Just like on the pitch, there has to be an overall winner though. Rumours of Morgan Stanley's James Bond theme seemed very promising, but fell flat when it turned out that there were no tuxes in sight (only MS-embroidered rugby shirts, which we doubt James would be very keen on) and no shaken martinis to fill the plastic martini glasses that were scattered around the box. All would have been forgiven had even one of the now quite numerous Mr Bonds actually been present, but unfortunately there was only the wall poster version.

Instead, the best box prize goes to Goldman – for reasons mentioned above and because of the party atmosphere that

prevailed throughout the weekend. While other boxes make do with iPods and under-powered music systems, there is always a party in Goldman's box thanks to the resident DJ and his wheels of steel. And, in keeping with the sporting spirit of the box's theme, Goldman was handing out velcro flags so that guests could identify themselves as England fans, or New Zealand or South Africa... but not Sri Lanka as one dismayed guest discovered.

CLSA, as already noted, gave Goldman a match in terms of party atmosphere and an honourable mention also goes to Deutsche Bank, which managed to achieve almost the same feel-good atmosphere as those two – without having a DJ. However, the German bank's addition of rugby-inspired details (in the form of crude drawings) to several well-known paintings that adorned the walls in its box, including a Maori tattoo on Mona Lisa's cheek, did leave us wondering.

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