

# Eastern Pennsylvania Rugby Union

A Member of the Mid-Atlantic Rugby Football Union

## KEYSTONE COLLEGIATE COMMUNICATOR

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Visit us on the World Wide Web at our NEW site at:  
<http://www.epru.org>

### **Welcome to the "Keystone Collegiate Communicator"!**

The voice of college rugby in the EPRU has recovered from its 'too hot' summer hiatus...and has cooled off to bring you 'all the rugby news fit to print!' I hope everyone is as excited as me about experiencing the joys of Fall rugby.....time for league play and championship action, followed by all-star rugby action in November with the EPRU Men's All-Star & Women's Under 23 teams in competition!

The standard distribution of this newsletter is to mail it to each EPRU college club president, Director of Club Sports and faculty advisor, collegiate officials throughout the country, as well as having it available at the all EPRU meetings. **The club president is responsible to make copies of this newsletter and share it** with his or her teammates, coach, other school officials, etc.

I need feedback from the reader on its content and ideas, as well as articles for inclusion. As a reader, if your collegiate club or local union has information worth sharing, please forward it to me. Thanks.

**The deadline for input for the Spring 2000 issue is February 1.**

### **EPRU Collegiate Rugby Program**

The EPRU collegiate program is the premier collegiate program in the United States. It consists of a number of components, such as, a bi-annual newsletter, league play and playoffs, coaching clinics, administrative and safer rugby guidance, and an All-Star program. This newsletter is a communication tool to provide players, coaches, faculty advisors and others with current information regarding individual clubs, events, safety, skills, resource materials, on-field results, the lighter side of rugby, coaching tips, etc.

The EPRU collegiate program has a number of goals in trying to improve the quality and enjoyment of rugby. These include:

- teaching application of the laws of the game for player advantage
- instructing teams in positional skills, game strategies, and coaching techniques
- offering organizational and administrative guidance
- providing medical and coaching knowledge for safer rugby

## East Penn Men's Divisional Play

With Fall rugby comes the competitiveness of divisional play for 26 collegiate teams. The men's program has been overhauled to provide a better balance of strength between Divisions 1 and 2. Division 1 now consists of 10 teams divided into 2 leagues; while Division 2 consists of 16 teams divided into 4 leagues. League and playoff schedules and divisional play rules are available at the EPRU Web Site. **The EPRU's top two teams Division 1 and top three Division 2 clubs will represent their school and the EPRU in the Mid-Atlantic RFU (MARFU) Men's Collegiate Championships in playoff action starting in March, 2000 against the top college sides from the Potomac and Virginia RFUs.**

The EPRU Division 1 playoffs will begin on Sunday Oct. 24 with semi-final play and conclude the following Sunday with the Championship match. The Division 2 playoffs start on Saturday Oct. 16 with the top 2 teams in each league qualifying for the quarter-finals. Semi-final, 3<sup>rd</sup> place and Championship matches will take place Oct. 23, 30 and 31.

## East Penn Men's Collegiate All-Star Program

One of the finest collegiate All-Star programs will continue its tradition of providing an opportunity for the both the better players and aspiring athletes to play under top coaching and against their peers from the Mid-Atlantic and other regions. The EPRU is proud of the tradition and success of its All-Star team (the EPRU won the 1993 and 1994 USARE Northern trials and its division at both the 1995 and 1998 St. Patrick's Day Tournaments in Washington, DC). Second year head coach Rob Grassi is looking to build on the success of the 1998 squad which defeated the Virginia RU and lost a close match to the Potomac RU in last Fall's MARFU Intra-LAU All-Star Competition.

Tryouts for the All-Star team will be held on Saturday November 6<sup>th</sup> at a location to be announced. On Sunday November 7<sup>th</sup>, the team will gather for practice and a scrimmage against the New York State Collegiate All-Star team. The All-Stars will then compete in the MARFU LAU All-Star competition hosted by the EPRU in Philadelphia on Nov. 13-14. During this LAU All-Star competition, the MARFU All-Star side will be selected to compete in the 2000 USA Collegiate All-American competition.

**Please contact Rob at 610-642-7066 or by email at [rgrass@msn.com](mailto:rgrass@msn.com) for more information. All interested EPRU collegiate players are both welcome and encouraged to attend the tryouts.**

## East Penn to Host MARFU All-Star Event

The EPRU will be hosting the annual MARFU intra-LAU collegiate All-Star event on Nov. 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> in Philadelphia. The event will feature some the best men and women's collegiate players in MARFU, representing the EPRU, Virginia and Potomac RUs and will feature players from National collegiate powers such as Penn State and Navy's Men and Women, Princeton and UVa Women, Virginia Tech Men and many other top sides. For more details please contact me at [cohensd@voicenet.com](mailto:cohensd@voicenet.com).

## MARFU Collegiate Teams Shine At Nationals

There is no doubt where the collegiate power - as a whole - lies in the country. Just look out your window - it is right here - in MARFU. Just look at this year's results from Nationals. MARFU has 4 teams out of a possible 8 in the Final Fours of both the Men and Women's Division 1 Championships. Hats off to all of the MARFU teams who made it to Nationals!

### *Division 1 - Men's Sweet 16*

**MARFU #1 seed Penn State finished 2<sup>nd</sup>** to perennial champ Cal-Berkeley. **MARFU #2 seed Virginia Tech** beat Colorado 47-20 before losing to Cal 36-3. **MARFU #3 seed Navy finished 3<sup>rd</sup>** by beating Army 44-22.

### *Division 1 - Women's Sweet 16*

**MARFU #1 seed Princeton finished 2<sup>nd</sup>** to Stanford losing 42-31 in overtime - in what some described - as the most exciting game of rugby they had ever seen. **MARFU #2 seed Virginia** beat Yale before losing to Marquette. **MARFU #3 seed Navy finished 3<sup>rd</sup>** beat Illinois and Dartmouth before losing in semis to Stanford 15-11. MARFU #4 seed West Chester lost their opener to Stanford.

### *Division 2 - Men's Nationals*

**MARFU Champ, Salisbury State**, finished 5<sup>th</sup> by beating both UNLV and Dayton after an opening loss to Northern Colorado.

## NEW USA Rugby Collegiate Eligibility Rules

John Connolly, Chair of the USA Rugby Eligibility Committee, has announced some significant changes that will affect collegiate rugby. **Most important is for the first-time is the inclusion of an age limit. These requirements are ONLY for matches that are part of the local, territorial and national competitions that lead to a National Championship.**

- Student athletes that have reached their 25th birthday prior to the September 1st, preceding that season's championship, are now ineligible. An **exception** will be for the 1999-2000 competition allowing student athletes that meet all other areas of eligibility, participated and were CIPP registered with USARFU in the spring of 1999, will have their eligibility extended through the 1999-2000 season.
- Student athletes that receive their bachelor's degree and are enrolled full time as a graduate student are now eligible to compete. This is conditional upon their remaining at the same university and meeting all other requirements (under twenty five, full-time student, 5-year limit, etc.) that all other student athletes must meet.
- In all-star competition student athletes that attend institutions without rugby programs are now eligible. It is important to note that student athletes attending institutions with a rugby program and elect not to represent their university, will not be eligible to compete in all-star competition.
- Any collegiate team that is not recognized by the university may petition their local area union, territorial union and then USARFU. This form can be obtained from the national office as well at their website (<http://www.usarugby.org>).

For the complete USA Rugby Eligibility Requirements, please go to:  
**<http://www.usarugby.org/eligibil.htm>**

## Rugby Safety Program

**Rugby is a strenuous physical contact game incorporating running, handling, kicking and contact. Basic safety precautions should be considered to ensure adequate protection for all participants. Responsibility for being prepared to play is shared among the administrators, coaches, referees, and most important, the participant.**

Due to the risk of spinal and catastrophic neck injuries and other forms of injury while playing any contact sport, such as rugby, the EPRU has prepared and distributed a paper entitled "Safety Precaution Recommendations". This paper is also at the EPRU web site.

### Player Safety Alert

Do **NOT** let anyone practice or play with your team unless they have **medical insurance**. Please be sure you, as the club president, **VERIFIES** their proof of insurance!

Do **NOT** let anyone play with your team unless they have watched the **USARFU Safety Video Tape** (contact the USARFU office to receive a copy) and have completed and signed their **CIPP** registration form. CIPP forms and money are to be sent into USARFU prior to their first match!

### Club Safety Alert

Do **NOT** practice or play unless you have a complete medical kit at the field!

Do **NOT** play unless either a trainer, EMT or ambulance is present. Whether an ambulance is present or not, you **MUST** have a telephone at or adjacent to the field and the phone number for requesting an ambulance readily available!

## Making Rugby Safer

In its continuing effort to help make rugby a safer sport, the EPRU has prepared "**Making Rugby Safer**" which addresses the following issues:

Injury Reporting, Testing For Concussion, USA Rugby Policy on Lesions, Bloodborne Infections and Contact Sports, and identifies numerous Resources for Safer Rugby

This document has been distributed to USA Rugby officials, Rugby Magazine and others. It can be found at the EPRU web site or sent to you by snail or email - just let me know.

## Spring 1999 Top Five - EPRU Men

<u>PLACE</u>	<u>TEAM</u>
1	EAST STROUDBURG UNIVERSITY
2	PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
3	UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON
4	KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY
5	VILLANOVA

## The Coaching Side of Rugby

For information on coaching and other important aspects of developing a quality rugby program, please check out the following world wide web sites:

USA Rugby: <http://www.usarugby.org>

International Rugby Board: <http://www.irfb.com/>

University of Idaho: <http://www.phys.uidaho.edu:80/rugby/>

Coaching Info for Members [nominal fee]: <http://ultimaterugby.on.ca>

## **6 Player Sub Rule - Why I Have A Love-Hate Relationship**

by Paul Jansen

Coach, University of North Carolina RFC

email: [zinetti@ibm.net](mailto:zinetti@ibm.net)

According to the USA Rugby Handbook and Laws of the Game 1998-1999 edition Law 3(10): Up to two substitutes of front row players and up to four substitutes of the other players may be made for any reason when the ball is dead and with the permission of the referee. This law isn't open to much interpretation, it means what it says. Ball dead, check with referee, and make the sub. This makes for an interesting way to plan a strategy for your games, given that you have enough players to make these substitutions. The strategy that I used last season and the one I will use again this season is to make at least 4 substitutions at halftime. I usually substitute 2 flankers and either the 8man or a second row. Sometimes I will substitute a back if they are having a particularly bad game. I usually start the match with my biggest and hardest hitting flankers, and instruct them to play as hard as they can, because they only have 40 minutes on the field. I tell them I want them to come off at the half with nothing left. At the half I put in flankers that are usually a little smaller but faster, and they usually play better in the loose. My plan is in the first half I get the bigger flankers to tire out the opposing flankers, then put in fresh legs, which are also faster. The second row substitution, usually is to bring a fresh body on the field. It also can give an added dimension to scrums or loose play depending on the player. Another advantage to putting in fresh players is that they have had time to observe their opponents and can make the necessary adjustments for the next half.

If all this sounds good, but be aware, it can come with a cost. The cost in my case, was players complaining about playing time. I incorrectly assumed that the players I coached would have no problem only playing a half if it meant that we would increase our chances of winning. About two thirds of the way through our season I began to hear grumblings about other players ability and fitness. So and so is only good for a half, what if he gets injured, who has the fitness to play a full 80 minutes? This leads in to the other issue with this strategy, not enough replacements. If you only have 4 good flankers what happens when one or even two get injured? Fortunately I have not had to cross that bridge, our team usually has a 6 quality flankers and 2 more behind those that are developing into good players. So usually that can deflect the fitness question. We also make fitness a big part of practice so that if we only have 2 flankers they have the ability to play a full 40 minutes.

The ability to substitute some of the hardest working players in rugby has brought an added dimension to the game. Substitutions can also be used in other tactical situations. For example a place kicker who can make the difficult kicks but may not have great hands can help with that crucial last minute penalty kick. Or a prop who is slow on the field, but dominates in the pack can change the dimension of your play. Using tactical substitutions is also an effective way to get playing time for developing players and a way to bring in the play maker who isn't so fit but can

play for 20 minutes. I would suggest to those of you who are reading this to try and develop a plan for tactical substitutions.

## Preparing the Team

by Alan Hutchinson

You have two weeks -- say four practices and a squad game -- before your first game. You know what some of your players can do but there are new and untried players and it is an absolute given that none of the players are match fit. Face it, the team is not going to be ready. You and they don't have enough time to prepare properly, their fitness can't possibly respond in two weeks and producing fully functioning units never mind a team in this short time is simply not possible. The question is, "With the limited time available where should I put my priorities?" {Sounds like the start of the Fall season for most college teams!} Here are my suggestions for covering the basics and avoiding the variations.

### **Team Meeting**

Scheduling an early team meeting is useful, but if you can't find time use the first half-hour of your first practice to cover the crucial steps: (NOTE: Half an hour is enough. More than that turns into a debating session, less and you can't cover your three crucial points. Plus, the team must know that you are not around to waste their time -- or your own.)

### **Team Building**

Your first priority, before ball skills, unit tactics and where the tight-head's feet go, is to start the team-building process. You must create the concept of the team. Players need to know that the team has a history and a tradition and they must know you and each other even if it's only names to start. Start with a short homily introducing yourself and identifying your key players. If the captain has already been elected or appointed he must play a part in this, so brief him.

### **Coaching Contract**

Second in priority is to (re)forge your coaching contract with the team. You want to coach them but they must agree to be coached. Put the question clearly. Wait for agreement. If you don't get it fairly soon think about what you will do for the rest of the season -- maybe there's a coaching slot open across town? You may want to encourage limited discussion at this time but while you're waiting for agreement look and listen carefully for signs of dissent. Even assuming you get a majority agreement you'll still have to deal with the disaffected so identify them and their points of disagreement now because you'll have to deal with them and sooner rather than later.

### **Rules**

Given agreement it's time to lay down some of your coaching rules. You may have a whole series of specific rules you want to impose but now is not the time. A few, simple points are better leaving the door open for more as the season progresses. At this stage telling them what you want with regard to attendance at practices, kit, safety and the spirit of the game is probably enough. You can spend a couple of minutes talking about the sort of rugby you want to play and how much fun it's going to be, but be careful to leave your options open.

### **Practice 1 - 90 minutes - Ball Handling and Possession**

Every practice should start with a warm-up and stretch session and end with a 5-minute warm-down. If the team wants/needs fitness sessions these should be after practice. The sooner the players get the ball in their hands the better and the sooner they understand the necessity to keep

possession, the better yet, so start with ball handling drills - squares, relays etc. and move on immediately to cyclic ruck and maul drills again emphasizing possession and communication. Spilled balls are bad, protected balls are good. Communication is essential. Discourage showboating but give praise as lavishly as possible. A stiff i.e. physically taxing, unopposed session at the end allows players to remember how it all comes together and give you your first chance to see how they run. Identify the shirkers (you're stuck with them, anyway) but don't worry about assigning specific positions, let them all run and they'll begin to sort themselves out.

### **Practice 2 - 90 minutes - Unit play**

Five minutes of ball handling drills emphasizing perfect passing. Begin with five minutes on the responsibilities of the units, tight 4; flankers, no. 8 and hooker; interior backs; wings and full backs. Identify simple objectives for each unit, suggest standards that they can easily understand. Split into forwards and backs.

*Backs:* run and kick, get to know each other unsupervised.

*Forwards: scrum:* If you have a scrum machine make sure that every forward hits it individually to begin the body position theme, then do the timing exercises (scrum-half should participate) and correct binding. Only then build a scrum. Twenty scrums rotating players but emphasizing timing, last ten supervised by captain/forwards leader.

*Backs:* Drills to introduce/build the concept of taking the ball at pace. Start the exercise and leave them to get on with it with the proviso that they'll have to demonstrate what they've learned when you come back. Don't worry about positions yet. Note: no moves yet, either!

*Forwards: Line out:* With hookers practicing throws (you don't have time to coach this, that'll come later) first identify jumpers then build lifting/jumping pods again emphasizing timing and coordination. The assumption is that everybody can and will have to lift so rotate the pods to give everybody a chance to re-learn the skill. Note: everybody participates in this including flankers! Only then build a lineout. Ask for two variations - say, 4 off the top and 2 drive. Leave them to practice these two variations (and ONLY these two!) with the same proviso as above. Tail-gunners should be responsible for getting the ball back to the hooker and keeping the work-rate high.

*Backs:* Check progress of pace exercise. Give the standard back indoctrination speech -- i.e. forwards hate backs because they waste possession etc. -- and explain how and why they are going to overcome this. Introduce two moves -- e.g. miss one, and loop two -- and run them emphasizing pace, flat passes and support. Rotate players until positions begin to crystallize. Finish with entire squad in teams for semi-unopposed - defenders enjoined to reach position but not to be too aggressive. The point is to "rehearse" a series of moves as teams using the tactics they've learnt -- e.g. on right side of field, lineout, 4 off the top, miss move in backs, ruck, reverse backs, loop move, ruck etc. Repeat, mix and match until the sequences work -- but if they don't end on a positive note while still keeping to your schedule. 90 minutes is enough!

## **Squad game**

If you have the luxury of more than 30 players pick two balanced (as best you can) teams -- if not, play 11s, 10s or even 7s dropping positions off as follows: wing, blindside flanker, full-back, no. 8, wing, lock. Make sure you have a referee and brief him about your priorities! Play two 20-minute periods with a ten minute break, no conversions. Make sure the subs get at least one period of play but your priority is to find a starting team so move people around. Identify probable starters in the following order: tight-head prop, scrum-half, standoff, openside flanker, 1st lineout jumper, inside center, No. 8, hooker, 1<sup>st</sup> wing, blindside flanker, outside center, fullback, loose-head prop, 2<sup>nd</sup> jumper, 2<sup>nd</sup> wing. Note: this order implies nothing about the value of the position but rather reflects the importance of the core positions you have to fill. Keep track of your changes using a table starting with your picked teams but with plenty of space for tryouts. 10-minute break while you sort out your notes. Play a final 20 to 30-minute period, Probables against Possibles. Don't worry if the Probables completely swamp the Possibles in this last period but make the point that every position is still up for grabs so it is up to the players to put themselves forward. Make sure the teams cheer each other off the field at the end.

## **Practice 3 - 90 minutes - Lineouts/Scrum/Back attack**

5-minute handling skills drill.

*Backs:* In positions but without scrum halves. Repeat drills of Practice 2 ready to demonstrate when you return.

*Forwards: Mixed and matched.* 10 live scrums each way with scrum halves emphasizing proper set-up and timing. Use the machine if you don't have numbers.

*Backs:* 2v1s progressing to 3v2s emphasizing lines of running, support and pass timing. Take a minute to finalize your back selections.

*Forwards: Lineout:* mixed and matched under supervision of captain/forward leader arranging calls, perfecting your two core moves and dreaming up one more which they'll demonstrate on your return. Emphasis is on your two moves, however. Take a minute to finalize your forward selections.

*All:* Ruck and maul drills.

*Team Talk:* Announce starting team plus subs. Emphasize necessity of attendance at last practice

## **Practice 4 - 90 minutes - Loose play, Team solidification**

5-minute handling skills drill.

Break into Starters and others. For remains of practice Starters should execute, others provide defense.

*Forwards:* 10 scrums. Starters against others.

*Backs:* Twenty (or more) runs using moves, Starters against others. Do half of these inside the 22 with the objective of scoring every time.

*All:* Restarts (kicking and receiving), quick line-outs and tap penalties. (In the interests of time available one restart tactic, no quick-lineouts and one tap penalty tactic may be all you can do.) These drills should be full contact, full speed.

*Backs:* Defense. Man on is the simplest and best place to start but remember it requires most discipline. Appoint a defensive leader and give him authority.

*Forwards:* lineout, cyclic exercises, (ruck, maul, pick and go, handling).

*Team Talk:* Game plan. This should be very simple, stressing defense. Identify defensive leaders again and assign them responsibilities. Cover discipline on the field, treatment of the referee, communication and support. Require attendance at game for all players.

## **1st Game Preparation**

- Team must be changed, booted and vaselined 1 hour before kick-off. Thorough warm-up and stretch. Continue warm-up to a good sweat.
- Water break.
- Kickers: Place/restart/positional kicking practice.
- Hooker(s) practice throws.
- Forwards: Scrum timing. When joined by hooker(s) lineout.
- Backs: Full speed flat pass, handling at pace, scrum-half/standoff coordination.
- Water break.
- Team talk: Game plan.
- All: Full contact ruck and maul drills - 5 minutes.
- Ball skill drills until five minutes to kick-off with maximum coach input reiterating game plan. Remind backs of their defensive plan.
- Water break.
- Team spirit session.
- Whistle from the referee.
- Coach's vast sigh of relief. But don't relax, your job is just beginning!

Alan Hutchinson coaches in Northern Ireland. He would welcome all comments, criticisms and suggestions at [alan\\_hutchinson@yahoo.com](mailto:alan_hutchinson@yahoo.com). You can find Alan's Coaching Notes at: <http://www.hutchinson29.freemove.co.uk/ahcoach.htm>

## **The Playing Side of Rugby**

### **Fitness to Play**

Premier rugby supplier BALL'S OUT!, is providing fitness information {at their website at: <http://www.ballsout.com>} as a service to all rugby players to help them improve their game through better fitness and conditioning. It is written by Ron Artingstall, the former Conditioning Coach for the US Eagles and the Great Britain Freestyle Olympic Wrestling Team and is currently performing these same functions for the US Women's Eagles as well as being the Conditioning and Skills Coach for the US Rugby League Team. Ron works with competitive athletes from a variety of sports and is available to provide personalized off, pre, and in season programs, consultations and clinics. Contact Ron at 610-876-2332 or email at [RASLA@aol.com](mailto:RASLA@aol.com).

# Making Collegiate Rugby Successful

## The Other Coach - A Lesson in Success

by Don Briggs

Coach, Mt. St. Mary's College RFC, Emmitsburg, Maryland

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I have been coaching young men off and on for over thirty years. I started coaching football at Georgetown University in the late '60s and then took a brief respite during the '70s to play rugby for the Washington Rugby Club. Over time I have come to believe that team sports are the best management courses a player will ever take. The primary lesson learned from the effort is seeing how one handles commitment. It appears that as time moves on, however, commitment to anything, with the possible exception of non-commitment, is a struggling virtue.

In a more "relative or situational" world, I find myself involved in an effort that still requires an "absolute or absolute" commitment. There is this old expression that we all have heard a hundred different ways "You build a team during the season and the players during the off season." This observation, at least in its pure sense, is not confined to preseason push-ups, etc. but also to a willingness of one to throw his lot into a team effort. To this end, a coach and the team have the challenge to take 30 to 50 individual wills and mold them into one will, if a successful season is to be had. A player can come back in perfect physical condition (which from a coach's standpoint, believe me, is nothing to sneeze at) but still not be "into" the program.

So how do you pull this "molding" off? Well, I am now the middle of my second start'em up rugby program. The first was the Frederick Rugby Club, started from scratch in 1990; and the second program "started" was at Mount St. Mary's in 1997. At Frederick, after a year of settling in, we went on to win four championships including the first MARFU Men's Division 2 Championship. There we snapped up and put into use grid training, the Australian drills, the scrap, and about everything else as soon as it came "on the screen." This was an older team, many of whom were married, and a bit further along on the responsibility scale.

Things were different when I arrived at the Mount in the fall of 1997. They were coming off an 0-6 spring season where they did not even score a try. They had sustained many injuries, including broken arms and legs, and while there were many returning seniors with big hearts, they were in poor shape. As another signal of the status of the program, only two freshman came out for the team. My first impression was forget about winning, this avalanche of injuries has to stop. So practices were basically confined to conditioning and then working on fundamental skills. With these on field priorities and a limited amount of time to practice, only a fraction of each practice got into unit skills, let alone any team skills.

So, the question was what will we have to do in this program to pull ourselves together quickly and in a way that would better prepare us for competition? Well, from the get-go, I felt the players would run into a wall for me if I asked, but if we were to break away from the past style of rugby something else would be necessary – the club's orientation would have to change. The commitment level had to improve attitude wise. So I asked them to do something harder than running into a wall; get into community service and in a big way. Yes, another commitment. Because of those primitive Darwinian threads that run through all of us, we all have to deal with some level of selfishness. In team sports, with all things being equal, the lower the level selfishness, generally the better the team results. And, yes there were a lot of "I don't knows," but

the seed was already in place as the team was already committed to a twice a semester campus collection program called "Pennies for the Poor."

This program was used as a springboard for other involvement, such as mentoring middle schoolers two hours a week. Before the team got involved with this particular mentoring program, the program was a bit shaky, but with the team's involvement and energy, the program is now on a surge and presently there are more applicants than volunteers. As a by-product of mentoring, we started a reading program with elementary schoolers that last about 45 minutes a week where the kids work on their reading skills one on one with listing player. This program has been a phenomenal success.

Last fall the team also did a service project for the town where the players (and their coach) painted yellow no parking strips for the town. This project was very well received by the town and earned us an invitation to play a game as a part of the Town's annual Mason-Dixon Fall Festival. Later that fall, we participated in the 10 mile Crop Walk for World hunger on a beautiful day that was a great time. Though we have never done anything strictly for a write-up, we have over the last two years had five articles written about us in three papers (not including the school paper). The favorable "PR" doesn't hurt us a bit; in fact, it has developed into a feeling of responsibility for something we now had to live up to.

These were not easy efforts for us and there was, still is, and always will be, resistance to this type involvement, because it entails a commitment. The tenancies of all 18 to 22 year old boys are basically the same, and yes, even when I was 18 to 22 years old. But the effort is building on itself, not only since we are getting recognition for these efforts, but also because it is showing up on the pitch in the form of a closer knit club. There is a feeling we are now investing into the club and not just "consuming" it.

The fallout is that the players are now operating out there in front of a lot of people which is what they will have to do as graduates in a very short time. The team developed a 220+ rugby alumni newsletter, web site and also an up to the minute email newsletter, 17 freshman came out for the team last fall, but equally or even more remarkably, three seniors also came out who had a tremendous impact. So there is truth in the rumor potential players are out there watching, and if they can see something in a program that makes it stand out and transcends more than just running into one another, they will come out. Also, we played an upgraded schedule and won our share; we made into the MARFU playoffs two years running, and; even put together a tour to Ireland. As I said, it just keeps building.

Like everything, the true test will come with time, and as we start the third year of rugby program, we will also start out our third year of community involvement at what looks like an even more expanded level of team involvement. These off field efforts that take so little time and potentially can have such a great impact on others (and the team even more so), also seem to arouse the biggest interest from job interviewers, as their number #1 question is "So what is mentoring?" In the end a little product differentiation never hurts.

## **Building a Rugby Tradition**

by Dr. Alex Curtis

Coach, Princeton University Women's RFC

Club Website: <http://www.princeton.edu/~puwrfc>; email: [adcurtis@princeton.edu](mailto:adcurtis@princeton.edu)

Over the last five years, the Princeton University Women's Rugby team has been a consistent national power having made four trips to the Final Four in that time. The team has been filled with excellent athletes who played good rugby, but their on-field skills are just half of the story. The main

reason behind the team's success over the last five years is that a "rugby program" was created. The officers and coaches have worked hard together off the field to create an environment that has allowed the team to play to the height of its ability on the field. Our experience is far from unique – a similar story can be found on the college campuses of many of the other successful teams over the same period of time: the US Air Force Academy, the US Naval Academy, Penn State, Radcliffe, and Stanford to name just a few. What is noteworthy is that it is hard to find a team that has been successful without creating a program.

To create a true long-term rugby program, it goes without saying that the first priority is to get the students to put rugby as the first priority of the club. That may seem an obvious statement: rugby clubs are supposed to play rugby! The reality is often very different, however, with many clubs more devoted to their social activities than their athletic endeavors.

A call to put aside the heavy drinking (too often) associated with rugby clubs on college campuses across the country may seem sacrilegious to many. Memories of post-game parties around the keg, of the camaraderie felt, of the songs belted out with gusto, and the feeling of being part of a rugby community, give heavy drinking and coercive drinking a sense of respectability that it is probably ill-deserved. Outside of the rugby community, the sport is too often associated with beer, rather than with athletics.

So, if a club wants to attract serious athletes, raise money, receive the support of the administration, or go touring, it needs to shake this image. Nobody wants to invest time or money unless it is going to be well-spent. Alumni and administrators will support rugby players but they are scared of irresponsible party animals who will waste money and potentially create large lawsuits! It is amazing how quickly the same people who gave a rugby team a wide berth when it had a poor reputation will flock to the same group once it is clear that they are committed to their athletics.

Finally, putting rugby first makes sense from a safety point of view. The one thing I hate about rugby is the injuries; I understand that they are a part of the game, but everyone involved in the game should be doing their best to minimize the number and seriousness of them. In the past ten years, like all athletes, rugby players have become stronger, faster, and better. The rugby pitch is a much more dangerous place than it was a decade ago. It is safe for a well-prepared player, but for those that have not taken their preparation properly it is a potentially devastating place. 10 or 15 years ago, there were many, many collegiate teams with the same attitude towards the rugby field and so it was possible for players to stay out of trouble by playing games against teams with similarly low standards. As things change and we continue to march inexorably towards a higher and higher standard of play, the teams that do not get on board are going to find themselves further and further behind the rest of their league. Believe me, it is not a pretty sight when a serious, committed team comes across a social team. It is simply dangerous and we as coaches and administrators must do our best to stop the situation by raising the standard of play across the board.

I have been around rugby players long enough to be realistic enough to know that you can not force these kind of changes on anybody that does not want them. Thus, the pace of change will be different for every club; some are ready for it today, while for others the process may take five years. However, it is a process that must be begun before any of the other reforms can truly work. Coaches and administrators need to convince the players that it is much more fun to be

competitive than to get spanked every week. I should point out that I am not completely against having a good time!! Any changes should be implemented carefully so that they do not completely destroy the off-field events (which are important elements in team bonding and recruitment). It's just the balance that needs to be altered: rugby first, social activities second!

When the players are committed to their sport it is critical to continue to give them responsibility. One of the strengths of the rugby tradition in this country is the independence of the teams and the role of the players in running the activities of the club. It is important that the players feel invested in the club and its future and so a competent group of officers should be identified and given certain set responsibilities. It is my experience that, within reason, the more officers the better. Too often the tasks fall on the one or two keenest individuals, who quickly become burned out or are irreplaceable after they leave. If the jobs are spread out among all of the officers no one feels overwhelmed and thus a tradition established that can last for years rather than just the college life of one person.

To create a rugby tradition one needs to plan for long term success. Too many teams become good for one year and then fade away when that class graduates. The true programs, such as for women's rugby: Penn State, Dartmouth, Radcliffe and Princeton have been successful over a long period of time because of the large size of their squads which are a direct result of their success at recruiting. A college team has to turn over its whole membership every four years and so there is an insatiable desire for new players. One can never relax as graduation (or leaving) is inevitable and those players have to be replaced.

Of course, it's easy simply to say "recruit," but how do you do it? Turns out, contrary to conventional opinion, it's easier to recruit for a serious team than it is for a team that is more devoted to social activities. Fraternities and sororities are much better social organizations and so rugby has to be able to offer something different to attract large number of players. So, it all goes back to the very first point that I made; kind of a "Field of Dreams" theme: Get serious and they will come!

Our most successful recruiting event at both Princeton and Swarthmore, where I coached before, was the opening student activities fair. I am sure that such an event exists at every school, although under a multitude of different names. Essentially all the clubs and activities, such as debating or the radio station, gather together, set up tables and give out information. Rugby teams often miss this opportunity because these events are not normally associated with the athletic department. However, since rugby is not a varsity sport at 99% of schools, rugby teams should associate themselves with the other clubs on campus and get out to this event. It's perfect: lots of first year students wandering around looking for things to do! It's a great time to make a pitch and gives the team a very high profile.

A rugby club should not exist in a vacuum: it is critical that the coach and the officers establish a solid working relationship with the University Administration. The normal rugby "us against them" mentality does not do any good for either party. Most administrators are only too willing to work with a rugby team; it is normally part of their job description to support recognized clubs. It is a matter of convincing the team that they can gain more by working with the University rather than against them and then demonstrating it.

The normal trade-off for help for the team for the University is that the team stays out of trouble. Well, if you have already made a commitment to putting rugby first, then the worst social events will be curtailed. However, the team will still want to have some off-field activities, so it is a matter of

convincing them to do them carefully and with some forethought. Not always an easy task but if the team see that they will get something back then the case is made much easier.

At Princeton, the most tangible benefit was money, which can make a fairly persuasive argument. When it was clear that the team was taking its rugby seriously, the school practically doubled the support it gave us: from \$1000 to \$1800, which made a big difference. Some teams have difficulty getting use of fields or other facilities and a conciliatory attitude can help solve these problems. If the team is seen as a positive force on campus rather than a destructive one, it's remarkable how quickly, a field will be found or even access to the training room granted.

This is an area that an adult coach or administrator can make the most difference. I meet with the head of club sports at Princeton on a very regular basis and have built up a solid working relationship with him. He knew from the beginning that I was a person he could deal with, who would take a more long-term view of the program than the undergraduates and was also much more responsible. I found myself as the intermediary between the students and the administration on a regular basis, which can be a little awkward at times, but is normally a very useful role. We could never have competed on a national level without the help and support of this administrator. In return, he has a rugby program that the University can be proud of rather be embarrassed by.

Unfortunately, without money none of the wonderful plans for equipment, touring, traveling etc. can be achieved. Rugby clubs are rarely organized enough to make proper use of their alumni and parents who can provide significant financial support. However, it is not enough to reach out and beg for money, a relationship needs to be established between the club and their alumni, in order to achieve the maximum support. We do have an annual phonathon at Princeton, during which we called all of our alumnae to request financial support, but we also send them four newsletters a year, which do not include any requests for money. A number of clubs already do a very good job in this area, such as Berkeley, Dartmouth, and Harvard, but the majority of teams simply ignore it. After one alumna stated that she barely read any letters sent by the rugby team because she knew what it would say ("give us money") and so she dreaded hearing from the club. Our quarterly newsletter means that alumni hear from the team on a regular basis and always know what was going on. When the phone call arrives at the end of the fall asking for their support, they knew why they were being asked and they feel part of the club again, resulting in much higher participation and larger gifts.

If the club is relatively new then there may not be much support from a rather small group of alumni. So, other routes need to be found to raise the necessary funds: I know some teams have been able to find sponsorship and this is certainly a route worth pursuing, but I have to admit that we have found it rather frustrating and unsuccessful. So, you need to find other avenues of fundraising, which is why we have an officer in charge of it. We take part in the EPRU raffle, we design and sell t-shirts or hats, and we often do a sponsored run. It's a big job but everyone needs money and if you put one person in charge of it (do not just leave it to the President, they have enough on their plate already) and undertake one or two major events each year, it is remarkable how much one can raise. Once you have raised all that money, there is a nearly endless list of ways to spend it: new uniforms, better equipment, touring, and even paying the coach a stipend (!).

The information and opinions presented here is intended to act as a catalyst, providing a series of suggestions that will point coaches and administrators in the right direction. I hope that it had given you ideas that will allow you to begin the process of making rugby a serious sport at your institution. It is also highly realistic; I have read countless articles that were simply impractical and so I wanted to give you examples of things that have worked for our club. The experience will be

