

# Eastern Pennsylvania Rugby Union

A Member of the Mid-Atlantic Rugby Football Union

## KEYSTONE COLLEGIATE COMMUNICATOR

Volume XI, Number 1

Fall 2000

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

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

The voice of college rugby in the EPRU has recovered from its "fun-in-the sun and rain" summer hiatus...and is psyched to bring you 'all the rugby news fit to print!' I hope everyone is as excited as I am 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 mailing distribution of this newsletter is to each EPRU collegiate club president, it's school's Director of Club Sports and the club's faculty advisor, and various collegiate officials throughout the country. It is also available at all EPRU meetings and on the EPRU website. The club president is responsible to share it with his or her teammates, coach, parents, other school officials, etc. by either copying it or directing them to the EPRU website.

Your feedback on content and ideas, as well as articles for inclusion, are welcome.

The due date for input for the Spring 2001 issue is February 1.

## The EPRU Collegiate Rugby Program - The Finest in the Land

The East Penn RU collegiate program is recognized as the premier collegiate program in the United States. The program serves nearly 60 men and women's collegiate clubs and consists of a number of components, such as, a semi-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, school officials 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 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 three teams Division 1 and top two 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, 2001 against the top college sides from the Potomac and Virginia RFUs for a chance to earn a spot in the National playoffs.

## 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 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). Coaches Rob Grassi and Marcus Maffei are looking to build on the success of the 1999 squad which defeated both the Potomac and Virginia RUs in last Fall's MARFU Intra-LAU All-Star Competition. Eleven EPRU players from that team qualified for the MARFU All-Star squad.

Tryouts for the All-Star team will be held on Saturday November 13<sup>th</sup> at a location to be announced. On Sunday November 14<sup>th</sup>, the team will gather for practice and a scrimmage against a local club. The All-Stars will then compete in the MARFU LAU All-Star competition hosted by the Potomac RU at St. Mary's College in Maryland on Nov. 18-19. During this LAU All-Star competition, the MARFU All-Star side will be selected to compete in the 2001 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 encouraged to attend the tryouts.

## EPRU Players Named Collegiate All-Americans

Congratulations of the highest order go to the following East Penn players for being named Collegiate All-Americans. On the men's side, Joe Cassidy of Shippensburg, Tim Losey and Ray McGettigan of East Stroudsburg as a result of their outstanding performances, while playing for the MARFU All-Star Side, at the Collegiate All-Conference Championship in June. For the women, Princeton's trio of **Elizabeth Bogel, Elisabeth de Fontenay and Katie Stewart** were named to the First Team. In addition, 'phenom' **Katie Stewart** was also recognized for her superb skills by being named both the Women's National Collegiate Championship MVP and the Woodley Award winner, presented by the New York RFC to the "best" women's collegiate player in the US. Katie led Princeton to a 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish in both the Mid-Atlantic RFU and USA Rugby championships this past Spring.

# The National Rugby Scene

## Plymouth State Wins Women's Collegiate Division 2 National Title

Northeast and New England RFU Champion Plymouth State (N.H.), coached by former East Penn referee Dr. Victor Gennaro, dominated the scrums and the rucks in a 26-12 victory over MARFU and East Penn Champion East Stroudsburg (Pa.) in the USA Rugby women's Division II national rugby championship. Plymouth State, last year's champion, was able to dominate the majority of the game because of its size advantage. Although East Stroudsburg played hard throughout the contest, it was unable to compete with the physical style of Plymouth State. Player of the tournament Amy Osterhault led her Plymouth State team as she set her teammates up for numerous scoring opportunities, including tries scored by Tanya Emerson, Kallee Hemingway and Virginia Rohrborn (2). Alicia Patten for Plymouth State. East Stroudsburg's outstanding Shannon O'Donnell was only allowed by Plymouth State to touch the ball twice, and twice she scored. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> place match, Illinois State defeated San Jose State, 53-0. After a disappointing 31 to 22 loss the day before to East Stroudsburg, the Salukis came with something to prove, and did so convincingly. San Jose State, a 24 to 8 loser to Plymouth State in the semis, made some runs in the second half but was not able to get over the line. The EPRU is very proud of and congratulates Coach Rich Ludka and his East Stroudsburg club on their outstanding accomplishments.

## New Guidelines on the Application of Law

<http://www.rugby.org/referees/refguidelines.html>

The USA Rugby Guidelines on the Application of Law are for coaches, players, referees and touch judges in the 2000/2001 season. The instructions were jointly developed by coaches selected by the USA Rugby National Technical Panel and by referees and evaluators selected by the USA Rugby Referees Association. Adjustments for law changes and for circumstances unique to rugby in America were made. When appropriate, will be made in the future as needed.

The Guidelines on the Application of Law are worded in terms of what both players and referees are expected to do to ensure compliance with the Laws of the Game. Although coaches are not specifically mentioned in this document, it is understood that coaches have the responsibility to coach players in a manner consistent with this document. Players are expected to know what the Laws of the Game require them to do in all situations. If they infringe or if they are perceived to be at risk of infringing, the referee is encouraged to use preventive language. The Guidelines offer standard preventive phrases to be used by the referee so that all players will know what the referee requires with only a few spoken words. The preventive phrases should be offered when needed; they should be pointed to the appropriate player(s); they should be specific with regard to the desired action; and they should be pertinent to the situation. Players should heed the preventive remarks of the referee as soon as he speaks; the referee should not have to repeat his command. If a preventive phrase needs to be repeated, it means an offense has been committed. Moreover, players should not depend on the referee to tell them what they must do in a given situation; they should initiate the action on their own.

## 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".

### 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, as well as, "Safety Precaution Recommendations" has been distributed to USA Rugby officials and others. They can be found on the EPRU web site or sent to you by snail or email. Just let me know which materials you need.

## Risk Management and Rugby Football

by Dr. Dick Borkowski, email: drbork@home.com

Richard P. Borkowski, EdD, CAA, is a sport safety consultant based in Narberth, Pa. The former Director of Physical Education and Athletics at the Episcopal Academy in Merion, Pa., his most recent book is titled The "School Sports Safety Handbook", published by LRP Publications, in Horsham, Pa. His third book The Athletic Director's Schedule Book will be published in September. He written a series of articles that should be ready be every player and coach. They can be found at: [http://www.epru.org/news/003\\_risk.html](http://www.epru.org/news/003_risk.html)

## 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/>

Rugby Drills and Skills Development by John Rose: <http://www.cs.utk.edu/~rose/rugby>

Coaching Links: <http://members.aol.com/wags40/links.html>

The inaugural issue of **JSTR: The Journal of Strategic and Tactical Rugby** is scheduled for web publication on October 15, 2000. Preliminary information is available at the [tacticalrugby] e-group's web site at:

<http://homepages.go.com/~tacticalrugby/index.html>

We are seeking articles, notes, coaching and playing philosophy statements, attacking and defensive schemes and specific ploys that work (with diagrams of such), practice drills and routines, suggestions, and innovative concepts for incorporation into this quarterly e-journal. There will also be a "Letter's to the Editor" section, space reserved for "Guest Columns," a "Coach's Corner" regular feature, etc.

We are also looking for new members for our already international discussion e-group:

<http://www.egroups.com/group/tacticalrugby>

Please send any queries or submissions to:

Frank Coffman, Editor [at:fcoffman@primenet.com](mailto:at:fcoffman@primenet.com)

### Dedication.....to "our" Sport...

#### An "Aging" Rugger's Perspective

by Chris Carr, email: [Chris.Carr@bbmus.com](mailto:Chris.Carr@bbmus.com)  
Dedicated Coach, Lehigh University Men's RFC

I never have been one for "labels". Simply, they don't last and even simple descriptions mean many things to many different people. Today, as mainstream political parties describe their platforms as "conservative liberalism" and "compassionate conservatism", even "labels" that were once regarded as "black and white" become "gray". "Bad" is good, and has been for some time. "Hot" is cool and "sweet" often means something far more than just pleasant tasting.

As always, the exception to every rule is that there is an exception....to every rule. There are adjectives that more often than not, elicit the same response from the general population; dedication is such a "label".

Certainly, we would all agree with the criteria that define a dedicated father or mother. Defining a dedicated employee may be a bit more difficult but in the end, everyone would agree that this adjective describes one who is as concerned with the well-being of the company proper as with his own success. But what, if anything, defines a dedicated rugby player?

As a player well into his second decade of active participation, I will be the first to admit that I am no longer a dedicated rugby player. After the birth of my first child and with ridiculous business travel commitments, scheduled fitness sessions and a full rugby season became difficult. With two children, and a third on the way, the prospect of maintaining active player

status became nonexistent. Not only did I wrestle with the internal challenges of giving up a sport that was, pardon the cliché, "in my blood", but I also had to seriously consider a profound change to my active lifestyle. Everyone who has experienced a significant change or altogether "drop" in a training regiment knows how hard it is to get back to a high level of fitness. Beyond the personal concerns and issues, there were club issues to tackle. The small, third division club that I had been playing with was battling the "numbers game" as most of the experienced players were well into their 30's. Not only did I feel that I was letting the club down by being a "part timer" at best, but there was open hostility exhibited when, as a transient participant, I was selected to the first side. I was not alone. There were other players in my same situation and based on my experiences, I offer the following suggestions:

First, be honest with yourself and your club. If you have family and business commitments, schedule your week/month in advance. Know what your own priorities are and balance these priorities with input from your wife, partner, or employer. Everyone's priority break-down is different and what works for the twenty-two year old, single, recent college grad probably won't work for a thirty-five year old father of three.

Let your club president or executive committee know, in no uncertain terms, your level of dedication. If you will be unavailable for selection for specific matches, don't pretend that you will be there only to cause a last-minute selection "scramble" the morning of the match. In regard to training, it is equally important to make your status known to avoid hard feelings. Nothing solicits negative sentiment from club members more than first-side players consistently missing scheduled training. These points are especially true if you are a member of a smaller club or collegiate side.

For the realist who confronts the dedication issue, there are alternatives. For the first time in years, I see relatively young players entering the refereeing ranks. None too soon, I might add, as the number of qualified, certified referees seems to be at an all time low. By virtue of their age and the fact that many of these players are "children" of the Southern Hemisphere style of rugby that will dominate the game for the next decade, this generation of officials could go a long way in promoting a progressive style of play here in the states.

For me, my dedication to the game has become coaching. I have found the challenges on the coaching side to be quite different from active play, obviously, and the fact that I am involved with a relatively large university has its own set of inherent opportunities as well. My early-season objectives, in terms of making my expectations known, are not unlike those noted above. When we begin practice in late August, I will let the club know exactly what my priorities are and exactly what I expect from them. Do I expect my senior wing to only make one training session per week and to miss two matches this season due to a certain law review class? Certainly. If not my winger, duties far above and beyond those required on the "pitch" will draw the student-athletes away from the playing field. Are they still dedicated? The answer is a resounding yes. They, like me, will have made the level of their dedication known to the club and ultimately themselves.

### Improving the Standard of Our Rugby

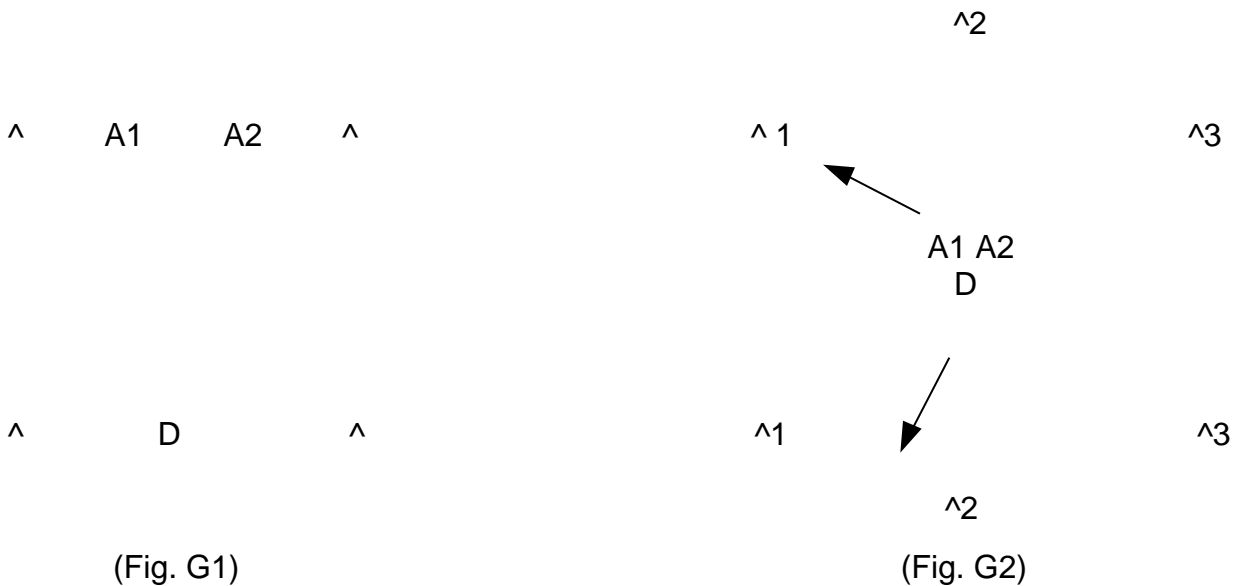
by Dennis Shade, email: [dshade@state.pa.us](mailto:dshade@state.pa.us)  
Coach, Harrisburg Men's RFC, Harrisburg, PA

Rugby was once described to me as "**a game of chess played at lightning pace**". Unlike chess however, the modern rugby combatant is neither restricted in their movements nor limited to well-defined roles after first phase possession. Each player must be able to make the transition from forward to back or back to forward at a moment's notice, and **while moving at pace**. Players must be able to make these transitions in a split second or either possession or

the opportunity for a try may be lost. It is no longer possible to be successful as a one-dimensional rugby player, or with a team of players with limited skills and fitness. The complete rugby player must therefore have within their arsenal a myriad of skills, along with the physical fitness and correct decision-making that will enable them to utilize these skills at the right place and at the right time.

These transitional roles require that the entire team work on decision-making drills constantly. Most of us are familiar with 2v1 or 3v1 drills focusing on the ability to beat a defender either individually or via timing of the pass to put a teammate into space. (People may argue that it is not necessarily the **how** to pass, but the **when** which is the most important thing. I argue that if you cannot give or take a pass, the **how**, then knowing the **when** to pass is superfluous.) Decision making drills must not be limited to 2v1 or 3v1, but designed to incorporate all the skills players may require during a rugby match. They should also be developed in an orderly progression from simple to complex.

An example of this type of sequencing starting from the 2v1 might go like this: Start with a 10x10 meter grid with three players and one ball. Two attackers (A) begin at one end with one defender (D) standing at the other. See Fig. G1.



On the whistle the two attackers try to score past the one defender, (2v1), who also comes off of his line at the whistle. Make them get used to grounding the ball too! Whether or not the attackers are successful, the players carry on to the opposite side of the grid where the cycle is repeated for a set number of circuits, (3-5), and the players then switch around, i.e. one attacker goes to defense and the defender becomes an attacker. This is a simple drill requiring decision-making while allowing the players to compete against each other, which they enjoy. If you want to keep score, award one point for a successful try, and the various grids can compete against each other. Once they get this down, the variations are pretty much limited by the imagination of the coach or even better, let the players come up with variations themselves. Here are some examples which may help your players progress:

1. Start with the ball on the ground. Have the attackers or defender, (or both), start out facing backwards, lying down or do a pushup before they can come into the grid. One attacker needs to communicate, "My ball", pick it up, and locate the defender. The other attacker too has to locate the defender, make decisions about his supporting role, and communicate these to his partner. The defender too must read the situation and make decisions as to how to defeat the attackers.
2. Add a couple of cones and have the players start at the center or one side of the grid, (Fig. G2), and run around the called cone before they enter the grid.
3. Make the attackers each run around a different cone before joining the attack, or make the defender run around a different cone. Allow one of the players to start each cycle to develop leadership and communication skills
4. Progress from two-handed touch on the hips to standing tackles to live tackling. Attackers are now forced to communicate and make decisions based on the actions of the ball carrier. Link and rip, change the angle of run and timing for a pop pass out of the tackle, or pick the ball off the floor after the 'violence' of the tackle has ended. Support runners develop the ability to help perfect the ball carriers decision. **IMPORTANT - Live tackling should only be used after the individual skill has been taught.**
5. Add a support runner, (3v1) who leaves after the two attackers, rounds a cone, and supports the attack however necessary. It may also be useful to review the individual skills of ripping and feeding or handicap the defender by not allowing the defender to play the ball.
6. Expand the length of the grids and numbers of players. Get rid of the cones in position 2. Try to keep a slight numerical advantage with the attackers such as 5v3 etc. and make them work the ball through phases. Allow them to keep possession of the ball for 4-5 stoppages before you switch players from attack to defense. Stoppages are when the ball becomes unplayable. Restarts are with a tap kick with the defense retiring five meters. Two words of caution here. Make the defense aware of the offside line, and penalize them for killing the ball by adding a possession to the attacking team. Up to about 7v5 or even 7v7 you should limit the width of the grid to ten meters. No kicking is allowed. This can be a very realistic practice that works on almost all aspects of decision-making, and forces everyone to participate. Five minutes is a very long time for the players to keep this drill up. When you reach this stage this is a very intense drill and must be policed so that the players don't become overly enthusiastic. Do not be afraid to stop and ask for player's input. This allows the players to regain control if needed, and gives them the opportunity to reflect on their progress. It is often useful to appoint one person as scrumhalf to keep the exercise fluid although this doesn't encourage their abilities to assume that responsibility when your scrumhalf is unavailable. I like to finish this off by

enlarging the grid width to fifteen meters. You will be amazed at how those extra five meters really allow the players to open up the practice and score tries.

While players enjoy having a go at it, don't forget the importance of proper technique. Ray Cornbill, currently the US Eagles assistant coach, likes to use the phrase that you can't coach from a plate of spaghetti. What he means is that when things start to get a bit disorganized, you may have to stop and do extra work on some aspects of technique before you can move on. Well-designed, realistic decision-making drills teach the players to recognize the problems that they are encountering e.g. "The ball is being tied up in the tackle." and offer solutions to these problems on their own e.g. running too far, poor body position, slow support etc. This may be all that is needed and play can continue. A good coach should make himself redundant. The players will develop the abilities of self-analysis and problem solving that will carry them through the match when you are not there for them until half-time.

Building a successful rugby team is similar to building a house. Unless you have a solid foundation the house will not stand. The team's foundations are its players, and the successful player must be built on a foundation of individual skills. The goal of the coach therefore, is to teach the players the necessary skills required to play the game, but more importantly to get them to read the game so that they may apply these skills at the right place and time to contribute to the teams success.

## The Playing Side of Rugby

### Fitness and Strength - Keys to Playing at Your Best

Premier rugby supplier BALL'S OUT!, is providing fitness and strength conditioning 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. Strength conditioning articles are written by Ron Artingstall, the former Conditioning Coach for the US Eagles and the Great Britain Freestyle Olympic Wrestling Team. Ron 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).

### Dealing with Fatigue

by Ron Artingstall, reprinted from RUGBY Magazine, June 30, 2000

Vince Lombardi's famous quote "Fatigue makes cowards of us all", could also have included, and hinders our ability to concentrate and learn.

When teaching a particular skill in any sport, most coaches understand that the ability to learn that skill is compromised by fatigue. Muscular and cardio-respiratory fatigue is, in most instances, accompanied by neural fatigue. Never conduction becomes less efficient as concentration takes a back seat to a tired body. It is then that mental errors result in physical errors. It is imperative, therefore, that "new" skills are learned while the player is fresh.

As the learning curve progresses, and the skill becomes more instinctive, we should now have the players perform in circumstances more reflective of game conditions. To simulate game conditions, we need drills (and there are many of them) that not only create fatigue, but are costly when mistakes are made.

### Penalties

Consistent with that, any penalty incurred during such a drill should be paid, not only by the individual player, but by the whole group. This factor presents the player with two elements found in a live game...

- 1) An error as a result of his action, will have an impact on others.
- 2) Being aware of his effect on others will place added pressure whilst trying to perform the drill error free.

I have included one drill here to provide the necessary elements. Allow two to three minutes for players to familiarize themselves with drill before imposing penalties. Therefore, as in a game, there must be a price to pay for a dropped ball or any other error. Be it sprints, push ups, squat thrusts, etc; the penalty should be announce prior to commencement of the drill.

As ability increases, make the penalty for a dropped ball more severe. Remember, the more severe the penalty, the higher the fatigue factor, the more likely a dropped ballm the greater the pressure....as in a game!

### Drill

For this drill you will need: four players, two balls and two cones (or markers).

- Place markers 10-12 yards apart. One player behind each marker; these are the Passers. Two Runners stand one behind the other, approximately three feet apart, facing the Passers, at a point half-way between the two markers (and about 10 feet away from an imaginary line drawn between those markers).
- On the command 'go', the Runners split left and right, and sprint onto a ball thrown by the Passers. The Runners immediately pass the ball back to the Passer, then sprint to the other marker to receive a pass from the other Passer. This is continued at full speed, for 30, 45 or 60 seconds, dependent on the fitness level of the participants. Then Runners switch with Passers and repeat as many times as necessary, dependent on fitness levels.

Emphasis must be placed on a pass that is slightly lobbed, so that the Runners must run onto it at speed to prevent it from hitting the ground. The Passer must NOT accommodate the Runner by passing the ball on an angle and allowing him to receive it early, eliminating the need to run onto the ball. Any questions, please contact Ron.

Remember, playing collegiate rugby is a privilege, not a right.  
Be careful to uphold the spirit of the game in your conduct on and off the field.  
The image of collegiate rugby is a fragile one that is easily broken - so be smart and  
Be Happy, Play Rugby!

# Making Collegiate Rugby Successful

## Keys to Turning Around a Collegiate Rugby Program

by Nancy Kechner, email: carrot@cstone.net  
Coach, University of Virginia Women's RFC, Charlottesville, VA

In the spring of 1990 I refereed a match between Princeton women and UPenn women. Although the general level of play was disorganized and chaotic, the level of athleticism impressed me. After the match I told the Princeton captain that I would be willing to help coach them if they found they wanted a coach. The next semester I was besieged by calls from the Princeton women asking for whatever coaching assistance I could offer. Although I had previously coached UVa informally as a player-coach for several years during and after college, no experience had really prepared me for the challenges presented by a head coaching position at a major university. Within 2 seasons, however, we competed in the first Collegiate Nationals where we won third place. After returning to UVa for a job at my alma mater, I started coaching the Virginia women's team. Within 4 seasons we had placed first in the VRU, and ended the year ranked #6 nationally. When asked to identify some of the keys that turned these college programs into consistently successful teams, I settled on several important factors.

**Assess the Needs** - What is it that your new team needs to work on to succeed? When you first start coaching a team you need to answer several key questions:

- Are fitness issues related to their previous level of achievement?
- Is the limitation in their play related to the level of their knowledge of the game of rugby?
- Are there underlying problems related to interpersonal dynamics within the team? Do they get along? Are they a dysfunctional group?
- What is the team relationship with the University like? Is it supportive or adversarial?

**Design a Solution** - When you believe that you've come to the right answers, you need to design a solution with which everyone can achieve their stated goals.

- **Fitness:** design a fitness program that is appropriate for your players. Address all three aspects of fitness for rugby: flexibility, endurance, and strength training. Ask a local expert for help in designing a fitness regimen for your group. Go to the many rugby coaching sites on the internet. Ask every fit player you know what his or her fitness routine is like. Design a practice plan that challenges the player so that they feel compelled to train on their own in addition to practice time.
- **Knowledge of the game:** Get the team a set of Law Books to use as guides to learn the law. Design a plan to watch, analyze and break down videotaped international matches with your team. Make sure you address rules, strategies, tactics, ploys, etc. in this design. Become a resource for your team. Buy a copy of "Total Rugby". Go to the Internet and surf all the rugby sites. Educate yourself especially about the things you didn't learn as a player, and will need to teach your players. Ask other coaches how they teach things. Attend as many coaching clinics as possible. At the post-clinic get together ask the presenters questions you may have. Remember this: there is a community of coaches to tap into, and they all love rugby and coaching. Nothing makes a passionate coach as happy as talking about coaching rugby. Join the email coaching listserves out there. Ask the referees about anything rugby. They can help put thoughts

into the context of the law, and are also experts in what people are doing to circumvent the law. Learn as much as you can, and never stop.

- **Team cohesiveness:** Set a series of preseason team building sessions. Encourage the team to set realistic and attainable group and individual goals. Talk to your school's Sports Psychology Department and see if anyone needs a project. Get a book that deals with team building. Sign up for a local "Ropes Course" and get the team there. Instill the attitude that you are all in this together- from the coach through the captains, and down to the third string players. Describe what you're doing as a journey WITH each other. Let your team know that you're coaching them because you love the sport, and you want everyone to have as positive an experience as possible from their participation. Make sure that the team elects an ombudsperson. This individual is the channel through which concerns and problems reach the proper individual for resolution. Make sure that practices are fun, challenging and worth the player's time.
- **Relationship with University:** Without the support of the University your program can be dissolved at any instant. You need to make sure that the recreation and club sports administrators know that you are taking over the coaching responsibilities, and also that you will be accountable for the team's actions. You are representing your university to the rugby public: be a good example to the community. If fields are a concern, make sure that you abide by your college's guidelines. For example, UVa is in central Virginia where the fields are composed of red clay. When it rains, the water pools on the field and makes the field vulnerable to destruction. The administrators tell us not to play, and we must abide by this. If we don't abide to their decision they can prohibit from using all University fields for practice and for games. Without fields, we have no team. Also, when you present yourself to the college, assure them that you a new presence, and that whatever may have occurred with previous coaches or team members is history. Start with a clean slate, and work to keep it free of blemishes.

Implement your plan for success.

- Establish a practice routine that provides structure and is challenging for the both you and the players. Establish a database or list of drills specific to each skill, and use a variety to teach the same skills in through different techniques. Remember that not all players learn the same way.
- Be consistent with praise, encouragement, and constructive criticism. If you establish solid expectations of what you expect in each player at practice and during the games, it is likely that the player may seek to reach the expected outcome.
- Remember that no one ever tries to play badly. Sometimes players have bad days; each person has a family, schoolwork, financial obligations, and the same stresses that you have. Try to put yourself in their shoes for a minute and you might get a glimpse into why they're having difficulty performing to their usual level.
- Don't implement your total plan at once. Let the players learn success and build confidence before you add the next deeper layer.
- Allow the player to learn the right way of performing a technique by providing them with the opportunity to perform it wrongly in a safe and nurturing environment, and learning from their mistakes. No matter how much you tell them, experience is still the best teacher. For example, think of how many players have learned the benefits of going low in the tackle by getting pancaked by a stiff arm.
- Establish yourself as a resource for your players. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell your players that you'll try to find the right answer within a certain time

period. Go to the email groups and pick the brains of the other coaches. Go to the Internet and search coaching archives.

Set short- and long-term goals: Remind the group that Rome wasn't built in a day. Start small by establishing fitness goals. Set a realistic 1-year goal (i.e. move up in state rankings). Follow this with a third season goal of beating a rival or winning states. A fourth season goal may be to qualify for nationals. Longer-term goals include development into a consistent national presence or advancing players to All-American status. Remember: your team will only achieve these goals if you stay on top of your game.

#### Less Tangible Practices:

- Pick the correct game plan for your players.  
Look at the players who make a commitment to the team and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Build a game plan in which they can exploit their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. For instance, teams I've had at both schools were physically small, but the players had great intensity and desire. We decided to play a very fitness oriented game plan that would wear an opponent down by the second half. By the second half, the other less fit team was usually unable to play their game plan, and we executed ours.
- Earn your players trust.  
I've found that once you institute the right game plan, teach the skills to execute the plan effectively, and start to achieve some success in terms of winning or just playing better, the players will trust you when they see that their efforts are rewarded with success.
- Earn your players respect.  
No matter what your personal style is, if you treat your players as valued individuals, you will earn their respect. This includes admitting when you are wrong, pointing out when they're right, and giving words of encouragement to the discouraged player. Treat them like you would have liked to be treated to achieve your rugby success as a young player. Remember that your players really are kids, and need nurturance, praise, and acceptance.

- Give your captain as much responsibility as he/she can handle. I make it a practice to tell the captain in front of the team that he/she is responsible for the “outcome” of the season. “Outcome” may range from challenging at nationals to making sure that every team member has a fun season. Success may not have anything to do with on-the-field performance. Whatever the parameter, make sure that the captain understands his/her role. Most seasons I dedicate one practice per week to the “captain’s practice”. This is the one day where the team is led by their chosen leader, and in which they deal with special concerns. One thing I have learned is that problems exist, but we, as coaches, can’t always see them from a top-down view. I also usually meet with the captains on a weekly basis. Our captain system consists of a season captain and a co-captain, who will be the next season’s captain. This assures continuity within the team regarding the role and responsibilities of the captain. It also lets them attempt to “improve” on the prior captain in terms of leadership, goal achievement, and other captain-controlled outcomes.

In Conclusion: My style of coaching ultimately involves everyone on the team taking responsibility for the outcome of the season. College rugby players want to be good, they want to compete, and they want to earn the respect of their peers. Coaching is a lot like parenting: you have to treat your players like children you love. Give them the tools to succeed, provide guidance, provide a framework, and give them the freedom to learn from their mistakes. When you first start coaching a team spend some time observing your group’s interactions. From that, figure out how they will view you, and how to tailor their perceptions to favor listening to you. Earn membership into their trust. You need to be a part of the group (even as a higher level member) in order to participate in and effect the group’s achievements. Remember: if at first you lead the team to some measure of success, they will believe that your plan has merit, that you are a part of the solution, and then you will have the beginnings of a turn-around from the past to success.

Background: Nancy started her coaching training by attending the 1989 National Coaching Clinic in Boulder, CO and has attended coaches clinics nearly every year since. She also attended 3 EPRU referee clinics in the early 90’s. Her inspiration and appreciation goes to some great coaches including Lance Van De Castle, Courtenay Hoopes, Joe Kelly, Paul Barford, George Hook, Lance Connolley, and Joe Grohovsky. Joe was the single most influential coach for her in terms of his ability to motivate players and analyze strategies and techniques.

### A Thoughtful Side of Rugby

“Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checked by failures...than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much, because they live in a gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat”. President Teddy Roosevelt

### Spring 2000 Top Five - EPRU Men

<u>RANKING</u>	<u>TEAM</u>
1	PRINCETON
2	KUTZTOWN
3	EAST STROUDBURG
4	VILLANOVA
5tie	BUCKNELL/ LOCK HAVEN

## The Future Side of Rugby

Brian Robinson, coach of the Lock Haven University Men's Rugby Football Club (LHURFC) reported that after an impressive fall and spring season on and off the pitch, the club kept to their goal of popularizing the sport of rugby in the central Pennsylvania area by conducting several informational meetings, sponsorship presentations, and developmental mini-camps in the Lock Haven area.

Through several fundraising efforts, LHURFC has raised well over \$2000 this past semester, with contributions still being received in response to a letter sent to family and friends. Along with this, the President of Lock Haven University held a dinner at his residence in celebration and recognition of a great season on the pitch, and the efforts the team has made off the pitch. The President also stated that he will contribute another \$5000 to the team's fund if they continue their winning ways next fall. The LHU ruggers are also currently in sponsorship negotiations with their local Rotary club branch, and have renegotiated their school budget, effectively quadrupling the amount given annually to the club by the University.

Always committed to attracting attention to the sport of rugby, and to their team, the teammates who remained at the University over summer break have come together to put on several demonstrations and camps for children and teenagers ranging in age from 8-18. At a park near their pitch, the ruggers attended a sporting fair in which children between 8-12 were exposed to several different sports, including the usual baseball, basketball, and football, but also rugby. After teaching and demonstrating many of the basic rules of rugby, equipment, and culture of the game, the ruggers then put on a game-like demonstration of sevens, and then put together a touch-rugby format game for the children to play. The event went over so well that the ruggers were invited to repeat their camp at two more fairs throughout the summer.

The team has also begun recruiting from local high schools, demonstrating the game to interested students, inviting them to practices and games, and distributing materials made by the team such as the Spectator's Guide to rugby, and the rugby starter's manual, both of which explain the game and a little about the team's history.

The team has also begun plans to start a high school team in the Lock Haven Area, and is putting together the framework to build the team hopefully within the next year or so. Because of these efforts, the Lock Haven Men's RFC came in a close second place behind the student Rotary Club for the Student Organization of the Year for Lock Haven University.

\* \_ \*

I hope this newsletter has provided you with relevant rugby information, ideas, etc. My gratitude to my friends, Brian, Nancy, Dennis and Chris for their written contributions to this issue and their dedication to the sport we love. Please contact me anytime with your input, suggestions or comments. Email is: [cohensd@voicenet.com](mailto:cohensd@voicenet.com)

Yours in the true rugby spirit,

Steve Cohen, Coordinator  
EPRU Collegiate Program  
116 N. Lakeside Dr. East  
Medford, N. J. 08055-8472