

Eastern Pennsylvania Rugby Union

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KEYSTONE COLLEGIATE COMMUNICATOR

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Welcome to the "Keystone Collegiate Communicator"!

The voice of college rugby in the EPRU is tired of the too hot and humid summer weather and more than ready to share its wealth of rugby knowledge both from myself and from the mind of seasoned rugby players and coaches in the cool autumn breeze. Why not? This issue marks my 13th year of publishing this newsletter. Something I am feel quite proud of. I am also thrilled to still be refereeing full-time, as I begin my 25th year with whistle in hand and 34th year of devotion to the rugby life.

I have made an important decision regarding the immediate future of this publication which is to no longer distribute hard copies via the mail (unless personally requested to do so). I have been mailing over 300 copies of the newsletter to EPRU-area collegiate officials and numerous LAU, TU and National rugby officials. Since almost everyone now has internet access, this current issue and recent back issues will be available on-line at the EPRU Website. They will be presented in Adobe Acrobat format which will allow anyone who reads it to print it as well (if desired). So, what I ask of you is relatively simple....if you are presently reading this and want to share it with your teammates, school officials, rugby administrators, etc., please tell them to check it out on-line.

My primary goal for this semi-annual newsletter is to focus articles and information on safety, coaching, and the reasons why we are bound together in the rugby life. For information about the EPRU Collegiate world, such as results, standings, schedules, playoffs, all-stars, etc., please contact me for the Men's info and Deb Yates (dyates@sct.com) for the Women's info. We'll be happy to share it with you.

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 club and consists of a number of components, such as, a semi-annual newsletter, seasonal email newsletters, league play and playoffs, men's and women's all-star programs, coaching clinics, administrative support and safer rugby guidance.

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**

THE DEFENSIVE SIDE OF RUGBY

by Rich Schurfeld
email: richs@accesstoledo.com

Editor's Note: Rich is a member of 2002 USA Eagles coaching staff. In 2001, he was the defensive coach for the Collegiate All-American Team that went undefeated in Ireland. As a player, he reached the highest goal attainable in the US as a capped Eagle player.

It was my honor to assist head coach Tom Billups and work with the All-American team that traveled to Ireland last September. It's a challenge to organize athletes with little familiarity of each other into a cohesive team in such a short time period. Among many other factors, the team's strong defensive effort significantly contributed to the All Americans gaining two victories over their Irish opponents.

I have seen many collegiate matches between U.S. universities. In many cases it has been evident that both teams spend a lot of time practicing their attacking skills but very little time on their defensive skills. I find this ironic for a couple reasons. There are many skills and decision points required to be a quality attacking team. Attack takes several sessions to organize and even then, the average US University team will make many handling and decision errors when they possess the ball. Conversely, defense is fairly easy to organize and a team can quickly become competent at defending. In my opinion, many US collegiate teams could make significant improvements in their on-field results in a short period of time if they focused on improving their defensive skills. Frankly, I think this applies to many club level teams as well. With that said, I'll discuss some basic thoughts on defending.

TACKLING vs. DEFENDING

It is important to realize that tackling is a separate issue from playing defense. Defending is the collective thought process and plan of a team to regain possession of the ball. The most common piece of that plan is how to get individual players in the right place to complete a tackle. Knocking the attacking player off his feet and dispossessing him of the ball is tackling. As you evaluate your team's defensive effort after a match, ask yourself these questions when determining why a particular attacking sequence by your opponent was successful: "Was the attack successful because our defensive pattern didn't get a player in position to tackle?" Or... "Was the attack successful because our pattern put a player in the correct position but the player failed to complete the tackle?" The answer to those questions will tell you what to work on at next week's training sessions.

PROCESSING "DEFENSIVE INFORMATION"

Scenario: Your team is defending. A ruck has formed on the field and those committed to it are busy competing for the ball. The rest of the attackers are busy organizing their next attack. What do I often see the defenders doing? *Staring at the ball.* It's very common. Many inexperienced defenders tend to lock their eyes on the ball in the pile. But there is so much more to be aware of. The attackers are organizing themselves. This is the time for the defenders to "process the defensive information." What are some of the reads? First, we *do* need to know where the ball is. But once you do don't lock your eyes on it. Just know where it is at and when it's going to come out.

Second, look at the attackers and see how they're organizing themselves. How many numbers do they have? Where does it appear that they will attack? Is the fly-half looking downfield for space in the deep 3? Are the forwards threatening a fringe attack? Are the backs calling for it out wide?

Third, determine what numbers you have in support on your side. Do you have more defenders than they have attackers? Is the number equal? Does the attack have an overlap on you?

Fourth, what is the field position? (I'll use a simplistic explanation of the Red, Amber and Green Zones due to space limitations.) Are you defending your "Red Zone?" (You're right up against your goal line and they're threatening to score.) Your "Green Zone?" (You've got them pinned deep in their own end.) Or the "Amber Zone?" (That fairly neutral middle ground.)

NUMBERS: ATTACKERS vs. DEFENDERS

Unless your opponent is deep in their own Red Zone and need to clear their lines to relieve pressure, let's assume they are going to run the ball at you. Let's recall our main goals of defense: First to stop the attack, then to dispossess them of the ball so that we can attack their goal line.

An important clue regarding the next phase of rugby is "How many attackers do they have vs. how many defenders do we have?" Three situations...

SITUATION ONE: MORE ATTACKERS THAN DEFENDERS

The "overlap" situation. How many more attackers do they have? One? Two? Three or more? (Uh Oh.) As a sidebar, one thing to make mental note of is "how competent have they proven to be at moving the ball wide while under heavy defensive pressure when the opportunity presents itself?" It's an unfortunate reality in US Rugby that many teams aren't all that competent at getting the ball wide when they've got you in trouble, especially under heavy pressure. If this is the case, perhaps a one-man overlap isn't of great concern to your defense. But let's assume you're playing a quality team.

There are many approaches for defending the overlap and many names for a pattern most accurately described at the "slide" defense. (Drift, Lead & Scrape, Hockey Stick, etc. are some variations of this idea.) In a nutshell though, the idea is to defend from the inside out. Communicate with your teammates and move together, up and then out as the ball is passed out wide until you have the overlap covered. It's important that you initially defend the attacker you have across from you until one of your teammates inside you in the defensive line communicates to you to slide, drift, or push to the next attacker because the ball is being passed. Knowing then how many extra attackers they have tells you how far you'll have to push.

Not having enough room to go into full discussion of this concept I will tell you one critical element. Do not ever compromise the integrity of the "wall" of your defensive line by leaving it to run behind a fellow defender once the ball is passed outside of your zone. This enables the attack to cut back or pass back inside and you've hung your teammate out to dry. Trust that teammates outside you will make their tackles and keep the defensive line intact.

Lastly, when facing an overlap, I do not recommend leaving any inside player undefended and immediately sliding out to cover the overlap. It's certain death to you. I've seen this approach tried and it fails miserably against quality opponents.

SITUATION TWO: EQUAL NUMBER OF ATTACKERS AND DEFENDERS

Being simplistic, we shouldn't need anything fancy here should we? Here we can play a man on man defense and it's simply time to not let our teammates down by missing a tackle. It is fairly unlikely that we will be able to steal or "poach" the ball during the tackle since we must cover the defensive zones and don't have superior numbers. However, always be looking for the opportunity.

SITUATION THREE: MORE DEFENDERS THAN ATTACKERS

It's time to lick your chops. This is the most likely time we can regain possession of the ball. If we recognize that we have more defenders than they have attackers we should communicate the "poach" opportunity to our teammates and swarm the ballcarrier. One completes the tackle, and then the extra player(s) are hopefully on scene immediately to take the ball from the attacker.

"LAUNCHING" THE DEFENSE AGAINST A RUNNING ATTACK

Regardless of the situation, emphasize the "launching" of a defense. It is ideal to take time and space away from the attack because it reduces their options, makes them work under pressure, and enables you to more often tackle them behind the gain line. However, many defending teams wait for the attack to come to them, watching it unfold in front of themselves and reacting to it. The defensive team should be in the blocks, like sprinters ready to do a 40-meter dash, and when the ball comes out, the defense should "launch" itself together at the attack. It's very important and very effective. This applies to fringe defenders as much as it does to those out wider. You may want to designate the defensive leader to yell "launch" when the ball comes out.

SITUATIONAL PLANS

There are many situational considerations on defense, such as how to defend the right hand blind attack from a scrum. Think about these situations and put a plan together for your team. It is important that everyone is thinking on the same page in specific situations.

If you need assistance organizing your team's defensive efforts, contact other experienced coaches in your area, or your LAU, Territorial, or USARFU staff for assistance.

For specific questions regarding this article, feel free to contact me via email and I'll do my best to help you out.

BEING THE BEST I CAN BE

By Ray McGettigan, Belmont Shore RFC
email: razrr1@yahoo.com

Here is a story about a former EPRU player who was an outstanding collegiate rugger who wanted to become the best player he could. A goal I suspect many players have. However, this player found a path and took it down the road and by giving it his 'all and then some' has become a standout Super League player. Could this be you? Absolutely yes. Read about his path and learn more about what it takes to be the best you can be.

Background

Ray McGettigan played for East Stroudsburg University from 1996 to 2000 leading the club to success within the EPRU. As a player, he played for both the EPRU and MARFU Collegiate All-Star Teams and earned Collegiate All-American Honors in 2000. Ray is presently the starting hooker for Belmont Shore RFC in Southern California and competes in the USA Rugby Super League.

As a collegiate player, I never really trained as hard as I should have. Perhaps it was due to the fact that we never had a "REAL" non-playing coach. Like many of the teams in the EPRU (at that time), the rules and style of play were passed down from veteran players to rookies. In the Spring of 2000, destiny opened the door to allow me to play for the MARFU collegiate all-stars at the USA Rugby Collegiate All-Conference competition. As a result, I had the honor of being selected as a Collegiate All-American. During the following All-American player camp, I met Kyle Quinn (a long time member of Belmont Shore RFC). Kyle was starting up a new rugby training program called the Elite Academy. The Elite Academy aim was to help top collegiate players make the transition from the collegiate game to the top-level club rugby in the US. I was asked to join and so I left East Stroudsburg University in the summer of 2000 to become a member of the first Elite Academy in the history of American rugby.

The Elite Academy has helped to set the foundation for the success I've experienced over the last two years in both Division 1 rugby and in the Rugby Super League. One way it did this was to get me into the habit of training on the normal off-nights and also by showing me the importance of putting 100% into every session.

The two biggest factors that helped me remain focused on what I was trying to achieve were the following in regards to truths in American rugby. The first was that American rugby is still in the infantile stage of its progression to becoming a power in the world of rugby. American players are not paid to play, unlike many of their counterparts worldwide. This means most players in the US have to work full-time and utilize their 'free' time for rugby.

The second truth I learned about American ruggers is that they are not always honest about the type of effort they put into becoming a better player. Collegiate players typically think they are putting in the hard miles of training, but many prefer to have a good time with their pals instead of training hard. **To become a top player, you must train year round.** I'm hoping the rest of this story will help you better prepare for a better rugby.

Belmont Shore RFC made it to the finals of the Super League this year. This did not happen by accident or a lucky bounce of the ball. The club made it happen by devotion to training harder than most and dedication to the game. A typical rugby club practices twice per week, such as on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This is generally due to work and family commitments outside of rugby. **At Belmont Shore our club was committed to training 4 to 5 times per week.**

Tuesdays were for contact drills, scrummaging and game planning. While Thursdays were for refining the Tuesday sessions and also for running through the game plan and making sure everyone knows their role in different situations. Mondays and Wednesdays were for lifting and running (mostly running). It was these hard miles that were an important key in our ability to outlast many of our opponents in the late stages of a game either insuring a victory or allowing us to make a comeback and win. Fridays were spent relaxing, eating well at home, and visualizing the match the next day. Saturday's were games day. Sundays were supposed to be recovery days, but they seemed like harder work outs during the week. Some of the recovery days were spent with runs to the bay, where we would then swim laps in the water, which was often colder than....you get the idea. Other times, we would run a path, sprint up a series of steps, run 10 long hills and then jog on the beach back to our starting point.

Our coaching staff was top notch. Without competent non-player coaching, as I saw in collegiate rugby, practices are often disorganized. The amount of time it generally takes to get practices going in the right direction is usually longer then the actual practice. Collegiate players usually come to love the sport, but the social aspects of the collegiate setting often become the ruling factor in how they spend their time and energy. So becoming the best player they can be, despite their possible desire to be so, is often thwarted. I know this to be true because this is the type of collegiate program I came from. So when I left collegiate club rugby, I didn't understand the game any better then when I first started playing. I did gain valuable insight into the game with my participation from playing on collegiate all-star teams, but this only happened a few weekends a year. Fortunately, my prowess on the field came from the intensity that I played with as well as solid athletic skills.

If you can understand what I am saying to you, then change the path that you're walking down today. Start to learn how to play the game better and it will only help you begin to achieve the goals you have hopefully set for your rugby career. Don't be a player that stops playing rugby after college. Find a club that fits you and go to where they are. Don't be afraid to move to another city or state so that you follow the path to a successful rugby career. If you need recommendations in this area, just ask EPRU Collegiate Coordinator Steve Cohen.

I would be very happy to share the details of my training programs. So if you're interested, please contact me at razrr1@yahoo.com and I'll be glad help you out. The programs I use come from the US National team and the latest workouts the New Zealand Super 12 Teams are using.

To improve your play, you have to be honest with yourself first and foremost. If you can't do this, then you'll be stuck in the place you're at now, such as a good player who thinks they are better then they are. I arrived at the Elite Academy as a no-name player, from a small-time school and now I am a starting player for one of the best teams in the country. My next goal is to make the National side, which I believe is within arms reach.

WHY RUGBY?

These next 2 writings provide a really great insight into this question. The first writing is from a rugby neophyte, a 16-year old girl, who has just started her rugby life. The other is from world renowned stage and movie actor, Richard Harris. Mr. Harris played in a stirring rugby film, *The Sporting Life*, long before *A Man Called Horse*, *Gladiator* and other films. His love for rugby continues strong more than 60 years after his first match as a young lad. The different perspectives these 2 people present make for interesting reading and have in common....the love of the game.

Rugby Is For Me

by Mary Merlo

Doylestown High School Girls RFC, Doylestown, PA

Rugby is an amazing and exciting sport in the U.S. It develops a unity between players on a team, as well as with opponent team players. It offers a really unique and outstanding athletic experience.

There is a bond between all U.S. ruggers. It is seen during games, such as when a player helps an opponent up after a tackle. It is seen at tournaments when a team cheers on the sidelines for the team that just beat them. It is seen when a team cheers for an injured player as he/she walks off the field (to encourage them). And it is seen when a tired team, kneeling around its coach, socks rolled down to the ankles, jerseys drenched in mud, sings its team song in unison. There is a feeling of family among all the members. No matter the fierce competition during the game, all are friends at the end of the day.

Rugby is the only raw, uncut sport left. While sports like lacrosse, ice hockey, and American football are suffocated by padding, rugby allows full contact with no protective padding other than a mouth guard (players can wear minor shoulder padding to reduce bruising – but it is not meant to be used as a ‘weapon’ as these other sports). Instead, it teaches players how to protect themselves, such as by proper tackling techniques (both as tackler and ball-carrier). Rugby combines agility, speed, power and teamwork in a way that no other sport does. It combines athletic conditioning, a high level of energy, and fun all in one experience. What a rush!

Probably the most special thing about rugby is that even though it is one of the most hardcore sports out there, it is for everyone who enjoys being fit and doesn't mind a bruise or two. It is a universal. The diversity of skills required for each position, enables almost every type of athlete to find a position best suited for them. Skills needed for each position are unique to that position. It is also the only full contact sport that is offered equally to both girls and guys. In fact, the rules are the same for everyone. As high school rugby increases in popularity (Editor's Note: the EPRU currently has 24 boys and 9 girls HS teams playing in the Spring), boys and girls team are growing up together.

Rugby is a very special sport with its high level of sportsmanship on and off the field and friendships it fosters with teammates and opponents alike. This is probably why people who play usually get hooked for life. Rugby is fun, fun, fun. Rugby is for me!

How Do You Explain A Love Affair?

By Richard Harris

Actor and Former Rugby Player – Reprinted from The Telegraph, London - May 24, 2002

It belongs to the heart, not the head. Something to be embraced, or spurned - there can be no middle ground. There are those who stare blank-faced when I talk of rugby but others instantly understand my breathless enthusiasm and stomach-churning anxiety.

We are the lucky ones.

Munster rugby. Limerick rugby. Through gritted teeth, as we approach Saturday's historic occasion at the Millennium Stadium - Munster vs. Leicester in the Heineken Cup final - I must also acknowledge Cork's wonderful contribution to Munster rugby over the years, but the essence of the game that I know and love is to be found in Limerick. The heroes of Limerick rugby are my heroes. Gladiators, square-jawed warriors who represent us on the battlefield. They are also heroes off the field - men who can drink, sing and talk of great deeds. I am intensely proud of individuals such as Peter Clohessy, Mick Galwey, and Anthony Foley. Keith Wood, whose father I used to play alongside, is another hero. He lives the rugby life we all dream of. It was a bitter-sweet day two years ago at Twickenham when we lost to Northampton, but the sweat still lingers. There must have been 30,000 Munster fans in red - an unforgettable and moving sight - and they conducted themselves beautifully. Supporting his rugby team is almost the only way a Munsterman can display his allegiance; we have no other comparable sporting or cultural outlet. Rugby has always been there for me, even if I have occasionally gone AWOL. I have enjoyed its many pleasures, as a player and spectator. Perhaps it is the sociability or possibly it's just the sheer physical pleasure that appeals. Very little on this earth can beat soaking your body back to life in a warm bath after an afternoon of cold rain, mud and pain with the prospect of pints and high jinks ahead. A warm glow envelopes you. Or maybe rugby simply brings out the best in people. It's a chicken and egg situation. Does rugby simply attract the sort of person whose friendship and qualities I enjoy or does the game itself - the actual physical confrontations and challenges it presents - help mould and create those people? Answers on a postcard, please. There is an instant recognition and understanding between rugby people. Would that it be so easy in the 'showbiz' world where, you may have noticed, I am not universally popular. I remember phoning Sir John Gielgud on his 90th birthday. I didn't know him really but admired the man tremendously from afar. "Happy birthday, Sir John," I bellowed down the line. "This is Richard Harris phoning from the Bahamas, just to wish you Happy Birthday and thank you for everything you have done for British theatre. We are hugely in your debt." "Harris, you say," replied Sir John. "I don't know a Harris. Of course there is that very loud, vulgar chap from Ireland. Did the Camelot thing. Very bad reputation with drink and women I believe. Very bad indeed. Rugby chap. Anyway, thank you so very much for phoning from Bermuda. "So sweet." "Bahamas, Sir John, Bahamas." "Yes, yes, yes, yes. The sun shines there as well, I believe."

I was a second-row at school but seriously miscast. I should have been a flanker. I loved roving, snaffling tries, putting in big hits - though we called them tackles in those days. I attended Crescent College and played in two Munster Schools finals representing Munster Schools and Munster Under-20 - I still wear that very red shirt and intend to be buried in it. I have left instructions - before TB struck and I discovered books, women and a hitherto unsuspected, or submerged, desire to act and show off. God, they were great days. To play rugby and glory in your fitness. To feel invincible. If you could just bottle the moment. Rugby was life in Limerick. It was a love of sport and also a parish thing. The junior teams were based around parishes and local pride was always at stake. We were tribes and you needed visas to move safely between parishes. Inter-marriage was almost unthinkable. Garryowen man/Shannon girl? Scandalous.

The rugby was intense and bloody hard - savage in fact - but, because we were neighbours, people were respectful and forgiving. Sometimes it was "them" against us - touring sides, the inter-provincial champs - and the competing parishes became a tight-knit diocese. We could be quite parochial. The players and supporters in far-flung Cork - the Posh - hated us and the feeling was reciprocated. Deep down - so buried as to not be ordinarily visible - we also respected each other as fellow Munstermen, but such solidarity was only rarely displayed or articulated. I have spoken before about my hatred of Frank McCourt's book *Angela's Ashes* and the film adaptation by Alan Parker - a highly selective, misleading and unbalanced look at life in Limerick. Let's put the record straight. Limerick is one of the most progressive cities in Ireland, an industrial powerhouse and home to one of our great universities. Of course, it has known hard times, but it is a city in harmony with itself, a city that has never climbed above its station, yet will reach the pinnacle of its aspirations. It has history, culture and humour. Above all, it has rugby. Not that we are above a little sporting chicanery. Do you remember those horrible quartered leather balls we used in the old days at school? Well, when the opposition was awarded a penalty in a kickable position two things happened, almost simultaneously. One of us would absentmindedly kick the ball to the touchline, while our captain was protesting to the referee or perhaps one of the forwards was receiving a lecture for over-vigorous play. In the meantime our reserves had been "preparing" a second ball on the touchline, soaking it in a bucket of water until it weighed two or three pounds heavier than regulation. This was the ball that would be returned to play, totally unkickable. Happy days. I adore Thomond Park, which I could see and hear from my bedroom in our house on the Ennis Road. It is the citadel of Munster rugby; we have never lost a European Cup game there in seven years. If Ireland played there we would never lose. Did I ever tell you I scored 19 tries and one dropped goal on the hallowed turf in various schools and junior games? I can recall every score in intimate detail. My proudest achievements - that and playing alongside Keith Wood's dad Gordon, the Ireland and Lions prop - the day he scored four tries, appearing on the wing, in a cup match against Mungret. I would give up all the accolades - people have occasionally written and said nice things - of my showbiz career to play just once for the senior Munster team. I will never win an Oscar now, but even if I did I would swap it instantly for one sip of champagne from the Heineken Cup. Good luck, boys."

DECISION MAKING IN RUGBY

By Phillippe Villepreux, 1993

Definition of decision-making: the capacity of the player to execute an action following some conscious tactical or strategical choice.

Definition of rugby:

A game, which includes both confrontation (with the opposition) and collaboration (within the team), in which two opposing teams fight to gain possession of the ball, with the aim of scoring against the opposition, as a result of their individual and collective efforts

It is the relationship between attack and defense, and the way in which they alternate one with the other in the course of the game, which lends a particular sense to this definition of the game. This requires that every player must learn to interact not only with his team-mates but also in relation to the actions and reactions of the opposition.

*The rest of this interesting viewpoint is found at:
<http://www.rugbycoach.com/club/french/decision.htm>*

THE NATURE OF CHARACTER

Provided by MICHAEL JOSEPHSON
commentary@jethics.org

Abraham Lincoln was very concerned with character but he also was aware of the importance of having a good reputation. He explained the difference this way: "Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing." Put another way, your reputation is what people think of you, your character is what you actually are.

In a world preoccupied with image, it's easy to worry too much about our reputation and too little about our character. Building a reputation is largely a public relations project; building character requires us to focus on our values and actions. Noble rhetoric and good intentions aren't enough.

What we're looking for is moral strength based on ethical principles. Character is revealed by actions, not words, especially when there's a gap between what we want to do and what we should do and when doing the right thing costs more than we want to pay.

Our character is revealed by how we deal with pressures and temptations. But it's also disclosed by everyday actions, including what we say and do when we think no one is looking and we won't get caught. The way we treat people we think can't help or hurt us, like housekeepers, waiters and secretaries, tells more about our character than how we treat people we think are important. People who are honest, kind and fair only when there is something to gain shouldn't be confused with people of real character who demonstrate these qualities habitually, under all circumstances.

Character is not a fancy coat we put on for show; it's who we really are.

