

Eastern Pennsylvania Rugby Union

A Member of the Mid-Atlantic Rugby Football Union

KEYSTONE COLLEGIATE COMMUNICATOR

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Welcome to the "Keystone Collegiate Communicator"!

The voice of college rugby in the EPRU is rarin' to bring you 'all the rugby news fit to share'! I hope everyone is as excited as I am about experiencing the joys of Spring rugby...with MARFU and National championships, along with a plethora of tours and tournaments highlighting the season!

This newsletter is provided to all EPRU clubs at all EPRU General Meetings. The club president is asked to share it with his or her teammates, parents and friends by either xeroxing it or directing them to the EPRU website. The standard postal mailing is to each school's Director of Club Sports, Athletic Director and the rugby club's Faculty Advisor and coach(es), as well as various collegiate rugby officials throughout the country. If anyone prefers just to read this newsletter on-line, please send me an email so we can save the time and postage; we will advise you when it is available on-line.

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

The due date for your input for the Fall 2002 issue is August 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 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. This newsletter is published as a service to its readers by providing information regarding individual clubs, events, safety, skills, resource materials, on-field results, 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 Playoffs

Princeton Surprises All to Win Both Division 1 and 1B Championships

Princeton found itself reliving its year 2000 quest for the EPRU crown....a rugby *deja vu* - if you will. The Championship Final found the Tigers facing the University of Delaware in an all too familiar scenario. In the 2000 Championship Final Princeton fell behind Kutztown early, while this year they again found themselves trying to find the key to victory during the halftime break. The final whistle left Delaware in disbelief as Princeton came away with a 22 to 20 victory to win their second consecutive EPRU Div. 1 crown.

On Oct. 20, in the playoffs semi-finals, they faced perennial nemesis Kutztown who had just finished its league season by soundly defeating all of its league opponents and a key win over Potomac RU power Maryland in a pre-league match. Princeton's coaching staff decided to shake up their lineup and mix in some proven "B" side players while adjusting their game plan in an attempt to catch Kutztown off-guard. This plan worked and Princeton held on for a convincing 32-17 win against the Golden Bears. In the other semi-final, it was a 'tale of 2 halves' as Delaware just held off a strong 2nd half by Millersville to escape with a 26 to 24 win. In the 3rd place match on Saturday, Oct. 27, Kutztown earned the EPRU's third seed in the MARFU playoffs by holding off a talented Millersville side 15-12.

Delaware was playing in its first championship final in its history, was playing at its best in recent memory and had defeated Princeton earlier this Fall in league play 17 to 5. The match started out with a bang by putting Princeton under constant pressure thanks in large parts to ball control play of their mobile pack and the strong center running of team captain Josh Horning and Dustin Sutton. The Horning family has much to be proud of with Josh and his brother Paul (wing) plus cousin Jake (flyhalf) all starting for Delaware in the this match. But it wasn't until the 24 minute into the match that hooker Justin Mack scored off a recovered ball from a ruck. Delaware dominated much of the first half, but with less than a minute to go Princeton Captain Jeremy Meserole scored to close the half at 12-10 in favor of Delaware.

The second half seemed to bring new life to Princeton as they consistently were able to counterattack and put Delaware under pressure and held a 17-15 lead with less than 20 minutes left. But the Blue Hens came to play and with 15 minutes to go scored to retake the lead 20-17. Not to be undone, 3 minutes later, Rob Koranda, Princeton's No. 8, scored on a quick 'pop pass' from sophomore centre "DJ" Vierra right on the tryline as he was being tackled with what proved to be the winning try. Princeton was able to thwart a last minute Delaware drive and win the EPRU Div. 1 Championship 22 to 20 and literally leave the Blue Hens heartbroken.

In what was supposed to be a rebuilding year for Princeton, the team showed how hard work and quality coaching really pays off. Kudos to coaching staff of Tom McFarlane, Richard Lopacki and Stan Ruda, along with the entire Princeton team.

In the same vein, Delaware's strong showing owes a lot to the hard work and dedication of their team and coach Hugh Kenney.

Princeton's "B" side concluded an all-Princeton day for the Tigers with a difficult 17 to 15 win over "B" side power Kutztown and earn the inaugural EPRU Div. 1B League Championship. Both teams finished league play with a 4 and 0 record. Kutztown thoroughly dominated their opponents outscoring them 173 to 10. Princeton on the other hand, managed to hold off opponents with three 2-point margin victories, to earn a shot at the Div. 1B title.

Division 1B was created by the EPRU to allow the ten Division 1 clubs to have their already mandatory "B" side matches be part of a league structure and provide for an eventual Champion. The idea was to improve competitiveness within a club and also with their opponent on the day. After its first season, the league was a major success as teams found more sustained interest, especially as the season wore on, from their "B" side players. In fact, a number of Princeton's "B" side players wound up starting for their "A" side in the Championship match due to their play on the field during the "B" league competition.

York College Dominates Division & Wins Its First Division 2 Championship

The York College Mean N' Green Rugby Club completed its first ever undefeated season (with an 8-0 record) with a 'never say die' attitude in defeating upstart Widener University in overtime 42 to 33, on Oct. 28 to win the its first EPRU Division 2 Men's Collegiate Championship.

Both teams went undefeated in league play and surprised a lot of folks this season. York did so in impressive fashion by outscoring its 4 league regular season opponents by a total of 154 points including normal Div. 2 stalwarts like St. Joseph's and Temple en route to its appearance in the final, while Widener defeated the likes of Lock Haven and Villanova. In the playoff semi-finals, Widener squeaked by Temple 19-17 while York continued its domination of opponents by beating Lock Haven 43-12. In the 3rd place match, Temple earned the EPRU's third seed in the MARFU playoffs by using its forward power to beat Lock Haven 24 to 10.

From the start of the match, referee Mike Cook was on his horse as Widener dominated play with hard running by centers Andy Cappelli and Shawn Conti with great support from EPRU all-star Kenrick Smith. Widener built a 18 to 5 half-time lead.

In the beginning of the second half York, the team that was the mighty giant all season, still struggled to score. During the first 20 minutes of the second half, Widener continued to dominate the lads from York and upped their lead to 30 to 10. York's dream of completing its first ever undefeated championship season was being squashed. Well somewhere during this squashing, something was awoken within the York team. With 12 minutes left in the match, flanker Brian Compel scored a fine try off a penalty play that began to ignite his teammates. In the final 7 minutes, York could not be stopped and scored 3 unconverted tries while the final try being scored on the last play of the game to send the game into overtime tied at 30-30.

Two late tries by Michael Hayden and Chris Powell in the last six minutes of overtime completed this amazing comeback by York and become the first undefeated rugby team in school history and the first to win an EPRU Championship 42 to 33.

Much of the team's success is credited to their coach Billy Engstrand who volunteers his free time to make this team as good as it can be. After the championship match, coach Engstrand could only say "What a memorable championship game. What a memorable team. What a memorable season."

Lehigh's Rebuilding Earns Both EPRU and MARFU Division 3 Championships

Lehigh University capped off an undefeated league season in the East Penn RU in strong fashion on Oct. 27 with a convincing win over determined Franklin & Marshall College on a sometimes cold, rainy, windy and sunny day on Saturday, Oct. 27 in Monocacy Park in Bethlehem, PA to win the inaugural EPRU Division 3 Men's Collegiate Championship. Led by early tries by speedsters Will Knipscher and Scott Mazur, Lehigh's offensive prowess may not have been up to form on this day, but it was enough to earn a 34 to 8 victory. Lehigh, well-coached by Chris Carr, kept their poise under pressure and let their ball control style of play guide them to victory.

In its continuing effort to maintain parity amongst its league teams, as well as strengthen their competitiveness, the EPRU created Division 3 with teams that have not performed consistently well against Division 2 opponents in past years. This served to both help strengthen Division 2 and also make for more competitive play in Div. 3.

Lehigh's Will Knipscher proved that nothing beats pure speed as he raced for 4 exciting tries to lead Lehigh to a comeback victory over the Virginia RU Champion, Old Dominion University (ODU), 41 to 31 on a picture-perfect afternoon on Nov. 18 in Richmond, Virginia in MARFU's Inaugural Division 3 Men's Collegiate Championship match.

With the ever-increasing level of competitive within its collegiate ranks, both the East Penn and Virginia RUs created Division 3 leagues for its men's clubs this past Fall. While these clubs may not be consistently competitive within Division 2, they still play with a real fervor and love for the sport. As a result, the Mid-Atlantic RFU (MARFU) decided to inaugurate a championship match for the top D3 teams from the EPRU and VRU at the end of the Fall season, to see how well they would respond to this opportunity for recognition which they did in style both on and off the field.

Fall 2001 Top Five - EPRU Men

<u>PLACE</u>	<u>TEAM</u>
1	PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
2	UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
3	KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY
4	MILLERSVILLE UNIVERSITY
5	YORK COLLEGE

East Penn Collegiate Tournaments Highlight Exciting Spring

Two major East Penn RU sanctioned collegiate tournaments offering collegiate teams an outstanding opportunity to play competitive rugby and enjoy themselves in a tournament setting are planned this Spring. These events are:

- April 6-7 - West Chester University Women's 6th Annual Collegiate Classic Tournament will have 24 of the finest women's teams in the Mid-Atlantic RFU.
- April 13-14 - Schuylkill River Exiles RFC's 5th Annual "Mayor's Cup" Collegiate Rugby Tournament will feature 16 East Penn men's teams.

News....from the Women's Side

First Annual Philadelphia Women's Collegiate Clinic

On Sunday February 10th, a fantastic turnout of nearly 160 women's collegiate rugby players from 13 different colleges converged on the Armory on Drexel University's campus. The reason they came was because the Philadelphia Women's Rugby Club was holding a free 3-hour clinic to teach them new group skills, such as the long-body rucking style and the new tackling techniques, give them new drills to bring back to their teams, and provide them with an opportunity to work on small-group or individual type skills that are normally overlooked at practice (like kicking, drop kicks, spin passes, etc.).

With a great slate of guest coaches, the clinic well organized to handle the large turnout. "We had a higher turnout than expected," commented Philly Captain, Melissa Wagamon, "but with all the help we got from the guest coaches, I think we were able to manage the numbers quite well." Guest coaches included former USA Rugby Women's Eagle Coach - Joe Kelly, former Women's Eagle MA Sorensen, Philly Women Head Coach Rachel Kenyon, Lehigh Valley Women Head Coach Susan Martinko, Brandywine Women Head Coach Rob Sanderson, Drexel Women's Head Coach - Kristin "Mac" McCarthy, and Chris Bailey from Schuylkill River RFC. Philly Women's players were joined by players from Brandywine and Lehigh Valley in acting the part of assistant coaches or demonstrators.

The format was a simple one; new group skills for the first half; small-group and individual skills for the second half. "We thought it might nice to give the players a chance to pick and chose those skills that they personally wanted to work on," said clinic co-organizer Meredith Hegg (Philly), "so we thought having the second half be geared toward individual elective stations would be fun."

So why host a free clinic? According to Philly President (and Drexel Head Coach) Kristin "Mac" McCarthy, the answer was simple. "We really wanted to provide a service to the college sides and to let them know that our club cares. "We wanted to teach them the new skills, and at the same time, let them meet some of the women's club teams in the area. So many college players feel that they aren't good enough to come out and play at the club level. We thought this way we could have the college players get to meet members of one women's team who's been representing the EPRU at National sweet 16's for the last 5 years, and the two teams who will be eligible to do so in 2003, so they can see that they have nothing to worry about, and that they would be welcome to any team they want to join - even the competitive ones. We all just want them to continue playing after they graduate." The feedback received from some of the participants seems to indicate that they were successful in doing just that.

Online information about the Philly Women's Rugby Club can be found on their webpage at <http://www.pwrfc.org>, via telephone on their hotline 215-309-0422 or by email to president@pwrfc.org.

Fall 2001 League Results

The women's collegiate competition level within the EPRU continues to improve with balanced competition in 3 Divisions.. At the conclusion of the fall season in November, the EPRU Women's Collegiate play-offs were held at Princeton University. The weekend was a showcase for fantastic rugby players and matches in all three divisions. From this tournament, Princeton, West Chester and Delaware finished in the top three spots in Division 1 each earning the right to advance to MARFU play-offs this spring. In Division 2, Lock Haven, Kutztown and Temple will advance to the MARFU play-offs. Good luck to these teams in MARFU play-offs this spring!! The Division 3 winner St. Joseph's is looking to face off against Northeast RU Champion Colby College this Spring in the inaugural East Coast Division 3 Championships. The final standings for the Fall 2001 EPRU Women's Collegiate clubs are as follows:

DIVISION 1

- 1 Princeton University
- 2 West Chester University
- 3 University of Delaware
- 4 Bucknell University

DIVISION 2

- 1 Lock Haven University
- 2 Kutztown University
- 3 Temple University
- 4 York College

DIVISION 3

- 1 St. Joseph's University
- 2 College of New Jersey
- 3 Drexel University
- 4 Muhlenberg College

Where Can You Find the Best Source for Rugby News?

Isn't time to invest in your knowledge of the world of rugby? Of course, it is. Therefore, if you have not done so already, I recommend that you subscribe to **RUGBY Magazine** today.

RUGBY Magazine is the premier source of rugby news on both the national and international scene. Why not check it out on-line today at: <http://www.rugbymag.com/>

Many collegiate players live together in an apartment or a 'rugby' house, so why not consider a shared subscription. It is a small cost that will reap its reward many times over.

For details on subscriptions, you can go the above website call 888-987-1010 or email: rugbymag@aol.com

MARFU Holds Annual LAU All-Star Competition

The Mid-Atlantic RFU (MARFU) held its annual Men's Collegiate and Women's Under 23 All-Star Event in Dorey Park in Richmond, Virginia on Nov. 17 and 18, 2001. The event featured the finest available men's collegiate players and "Under 23" women's players (both collegiate and club) from its three LAUs - East Penn (EPRU), Potomac (PRU) and Virginia (VRU). This annual event showcases the players in front of the MARFU Collegiate (men) and Under 23 (women) All-Star coaching staffs in order for them to select their squads for their upcoming spring preparation for National competitions.

East Penn Men Make It 3 Years in a Row

On Saturday, the Virginia Men started off slowly against the PRU and were down 10-8 at half-time. But when they dust settled, the VRU won a hard fought match 37-20 due to some outstanding back play. Later that day, the Virginians then took on a fresh East Penn team and found themselves stymied offensively, while the EPRU's solid backline running led to 3 first half tries en route to a 22-6 halftime lead. The second half was much more even and with 3 tries in the last 10 minutes, the EPRU prevailed 42 to 18 scoring 8 tries by 7 different players. On Sunday, Kutztown's Brian Foster two 2nd half tries prevailed as East Penn hold off a strong Potomac late rally to win 22-21. East Penn has now prevailed over both Virginia and Potomac for 3 years in a row.

The full story as well as a complete list of the team members can be found on the web at:

<http://www.epru.org/allstars/012marfu2001.php>

Virginia Women Finally Prevail

After years on falling short in this event, the Virginia Women directed by coaches Nancy Kechner (Univ. Virginia and MARFU) and Bill Lucas (Mary Washington College), showed they were the class of the women's field by pulling away late in beating East Penn 37-22 and then holding off Potomac 21-14 on Saturday. On Sunday, in the final match, East Penn put on their running shoes in beating Potomac 26-7.

EPRU Under-23 Women Travel to Virginia to Defend MARFU All-Star Title

Written by Angie Marfisi, Temple University

The EPRU Under-23 Women's Team traveled to Richmond to defend their MARFU All-Star title. They were coached by Oscar Matthews, Becky Snyder, and Matt "Tatonka" Szostak.

This year's team had a mix of veterans with select side experience and rookie enthusiasm. On Saturday, the EPRU Under-23 women team faced off against a strong VRU side. The match was a tough contest for the EPRU side, with a lot of scoring coming from both teams. The first try of the match was scored by the VRU side, but the EPRU side came right back and made the score 5-5. After a powerful run down the field by West Chester's Ashley Farmer, Keystone prop Maya Winters took it in for the try. The VRU side didn't let it stay even for long again scoring moments later, making it 10-5. Just prior to halftime, Temple University scrumhalf, Mom Lam scored a 1 meter try, after a sequence of hard rucks by the EPRU forwards.

The EPRU went into the 2nd half with the score tied 10-10. The VRU came out aggressive and put pressure on the EPRU defense, scoring 2 consecutive tries. The EPRU answered with a try by Maya Winters and conversion by Sonez Banard. The VRU scored again making it 25-17. The EPRU then worked itself down the field with a series of quick, accurate passes and strong rucks. Temple prop Angie Marfisi scored on a penalty 10 meters from the try. That would be all the scoring for the EPRU as the VRU sealed their win with two more tries making the final score 37-22, in favor of the VRU.

This being the EPRU Under-23 Women's first defeat in several years, the team was looking to avenge their Saturday loss when they faced the PRU side on Sunday afternoon. The EPRU side came out sharp and aggressive, winning quick rucks and dominating in set pieces. The first try was scored after a series of strong rucking by the EPRU forwards, which allowed Sonez Banard to score and complete the kick, making the score 7-0. The EPRU increased their lead after a 55 meter backline drive down the field, which resulted in Banard scoring the try. The final try of the half came with no time left on the clock; the EPRU won a line-out 5 meters out and the forwards powered it in, with West Chester's Alison Latta scoring the try. The EPRU went into the half with a convincing 19-0 lead over the PRU.

The EPRU continued their dominance in the second half, scoring again after a series of good second and third phases. Laura Bilazarian scored again and Banard converted the try. Making the score 26-0, the VRU got their first try of the match with minutes remaining making the final score 26-7. The EPRU Under-23 Women's All Star team was selected after two tryouts and was made up of players from women's high school, collegiate, and club teams in the EPRU.

The full story as well as a complete list of the team members can be found on the web at:

<http://www.epru.org/allstars/012marfu2001.php>

MARFU Spring Collegiate Playoffs are Set

MARFU teams have been readying themselves this Winter for the chance to make it to Nationals. Quarterfinals will be primarily held on March 23rd in all 4 divisions (men and women's divisions 1 and 2) at the home of the higher seeded team. The QF winners will qualify for the MARFU Final Four scheduled for March 30 and 31. Princeton University Men and Women's RFC will host the Final Fours which will feature 24 teams in Divs. 1 and 2 Championship and Div. 1 Plate rounds.

Details for the MARFU Collegiate Playoffs can be provided by contacting Steve Cohen.

MARFU Collegiate teams continue to assert themselves in National playoffs in recent years and it has reaped its benefits. For 2002, MARFU has earned 5 seeds in the National's women's Division 1 Sweet 16's set for April 20-21; while the men have 3 seeds. In Division 2, both MARFU men and women's champions will square off their South RU counterparts in the opening round Elite 8 pool play also set for April 20-21. The National Finals will be held on May 4-5. Details for the National playoffs for Divisions 1 and 2 can be found at the USA Rugby website at: <http://www.usarugby.org>

Rugby 7's in New York's Empire State Games

by Mike Raffe, State Sport Chair for Rugby at the Empire State Games
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Since 1998, the State of New York and the N.Y.S. Offices of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation have included 7-a-side men and women's rugby as a full medal sport in their annual Olympic style event. This year's event, celebrating the 25th anniversary, will be held in the Syracuse area from July 31st to August 4th.

For the purposes of competition, New York State is divided into six regions: Western, Central, Adirondack, Hudson Valley, New York City and Long Island. Trials will be held on a regional basis and will begin in the middle of May and proceed until mid-June. Practices and tournament play occur in June and July and lead into the Games. Athletes who make the final six regional teams will be provided with uniforms, sweat suits and meals along with the ability to watch all the other competitions free of charge. In addition, the participants can attend any of the other sports venues at this Olympic style event.

This year opening ceremonies will be on Wednesday July 31st and the games will continue until Sunday afternoon August 4th. The round robin play for rugby is scheduled on Thursday August 1st with the medal rounds scheduled for Friday morning. This year's play was moved forward a day to avoid conflict with the Saranac Lake tournament.

The past gold medal winners have been:

Women:	1998 Central	1999 Central	2000 Central	2001 Central
Men:	1998 Western	1999 Long Island	2000 Western	2001 Long Island

Anyone, who as of May 1, 2002, has either permanent residence, school year residence or summer residence in New York State should consider participation. Last year, players from out of state colleges like Penn State, University of Rhode Island, Providence College, Amherst, Smith and Princeton University participated in the Empire State Games. For additional information contact Mike Raffe at mraffe@tompkins-redcross.org or visit the ESG website: <http://www.empirestategames.org>

Wisdom.....from the Living Side

Here are some pearls of wisdom with life-changing capacity.

Think about what you want people to say about you after you die and live backward. --
Unknown

People are just about as happy as they are willing to be. -- Abraham Lincoln

Don't mistake pleasures for happiness. They are a different breed of dog. -- Josh Billings

The problem with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat. -- Lily Tomlin

He who throws dirt loses ground. And the trouble with getting into a mud fight with a pig is that the pig likes it. -- Unknown

When you are in a hole, stop digging. -- Unknown

No one can make you feel inferior without your consent. -- Eleanor Roosevelt

Rugby Beyond College Rugby

by Jason Wood, OMBAC Rugby Club

Former player in the EPRU for: Univ. of Pennsylvania, South Jersey and Philly-Whitemarsh

It's January 2nd and I'm sitting here in my the office typing up my business goals for the coming year and can't help but think about my personal and rugby goals as well. Two nights ago I hosted a New Year's Eve party with many of my OMBAC Rugby teammates and their girlfriends/wives. There's a shelf in my den that has some rugby memorabilia on it, including a picture of my University of Pennsylvania rugby team of 1991-1992 which won both the EPRU and Ivy League Tournament championships. Some guys were asking me about my college teammates and whether any of them were still playing. To my knowledge, none were and the topic of our discussion switched from my teammates to why so many college players don't continue playing after graduation. I would like to tell you about my experience in 'rugby beyond college rugby' so that by reading this brief story, you may be inspired to keep rugby in your life when college days are behind you.

My rugby days at Penn are best described as awesome. Many of my teammates have become friends for life bound together by our hard knocks on the field and good times off. When my college days ended, instead of leaving the rugby scene behind, I chose to keep it as a major part of my life. Yes, there is more to my life. I have a career, a family, and other interests, but rugby beyond college rugby fits into all that. I live in San Diego, California – far from the families of both my wife and I, but I have a family in my rugby club, the Old Mission Beach Athletic Club, better known as OMBAC. My daughter, who is 3 years old, knows all my teammates and enjoys time with them. The camaraderie of rugby is unmatched. Tours, parties, fundraising, administration, and more all extend beyond playing and contribute to a lifelong experience with rugby.

Everywhere you go in this country – and around the world – there is organized club rugby being played. It's easier to find within the small confines of a college campus, but with just an ounce of effort, it can be found anywhere life might bring you. *Rugby Magazine* publishes an annual directory of all clubs in the USA, and USA rugby's website and contact information as well. Rugby people like Steve Cohen and others would be more than happy to help you find a club anywhere in the world. And remember you can find a club that fits your desired playing and commitment level. There are clubs like OMBAC that have multiple sides playing at all levels from the Super League to Division 3.

I looked at that picture of my Penn teammates and then looked around the room at my current teammates and I am so happy that I continued to play. Not just because I love the sport, but because I have so many friends all over the country from all the years of playing and some great friends right now at OMBAC. **The best days of my rugby life were not those college days; the best days are the rugby days beyond college rugby.** My rugby goals for the year are still almost all playing goals, but my thought process is starting to move on to coaching and administration as there are now more goals in those categories, including trying to assist where I can with getting more college grads staying in the game. Maybe 10 years from now I will be looking back at an OMBAC picture of today and see my coaching days and experiences as the best of my life.

If any college player is interested in asking me any questions about 'rugby beyond college rugby', please feel free to contact me at jwood@cisterra.com

Knowledge.....from the Coaching Side

Coaching Resources on the Web

Lance Hayward's website: <http://rugbycoach.homestead.com> is a great place to go for a wealth of rugby coaching, fitness, etc. information. He also has links to many excellent resources on the web.

The Irish Rugby Union provides guidance on coaching and fitness which is found under 'Development' at: <http://www.irishrugby.ie>

From England a very useful site has been developed at: <http://www.coachingrugby.com>

Teaching Rugby – Contact Skills Part 1

By Dr. William "Loc" Vetter

Coach, US Naval Academy Women's RFC; email: LocVetter@aol.com
As published in *RUGBY Magazine*, August 2001 - Reprinted by Permission

In the first of this series of 5 articles on Teaching Rugby (*Rugby*, September 2000 and the *EPRU Keystone Collegiate Communicator*, Fall 2001 {available at the EPRU website}), we presented an introduction to running, passing and catching. Stressed were points of rugby and points of coaching. These same points should be kept in mind here.

The points of rugby included:

- Pass the ball straight across the field
- Look then pass
- Reach for the ball
- In support, be positioned to take the ball on the burst
- Touch the ball first with the far hand, and before the ball reaches you
- Run low
- Better to be a little late than a little early

The points of coaching included:

- Give the reason we are doing a particular drill
- Give the reason we are choosing a particular technique
- Emphasize the details
- Have all players accept that every role in each drill is an opportunity to get better and help teammates get better.

Most importantly, don't coach the flair out of your athletes. These introductory drills are intended to give all in the program a notion of what we are trying to do. Real beauty in rugby is not perfect execution of drills or even drilled skills during games. The beauty comes with independent, inventive, innovative and creative efforts of spirited athletes.

Rugby Favors The Defense

In order for players to understand why so much time and effort is spent on contact skills, we emphasize the following: rugby favors the defense. There are fifteen defenders and only one ball carrier. No one on the attacking team may participate in play when in front of the ball. It therefore behooves the attacking team to accept the fact that they must disfigure the defense.

Sure, some scoring can be done from first phase ball. First phase ball is ball won from lineout, set scrum, or kick reception. There has been a bit more scoring from set scrum since 1995, when the back row was compelled to stay bound longer. However, the bulk of scoring is still with ball that has been won after contact, "second phase" ball.

While the defense can be disfigured with fast strikes, deceptive running, or good kicking, there is nothing that disfigures the defense like committing defenders to the tackle situation and then attacking again, before the defense can adjust to the loss of tacklers and skewed positions.

Clearly then, a good team must accept that their ball carrier will be tackled, and they better be good at retaining possession after contact/tackles.

Quality Ball

Further, we not only want to retain possession, but we want the quality of the ball to be perfect.

What is "quality ball?"

Which would you rather have: 1) Hard won ball that required several seconds of time, several of your forwards contributing to the winning, with the ball ultimately dug out by a scrumhalf reaching in to the waist, so that no one knows exactly when it is coming, and the defense has reformed, or, 2) Ball sitting motionless on the ground, at the last foot, as fast as your scrumhalf can even get to the breakdown.

Obviously we'd prefer quick ball with which we can strike before the defense regroups.

We refer to beautiful, still, fast possession, won after enough phases to badly disfigure the defense, as "juice ball". There are not very many such balls in a game and most are best spun to the outside. They must be sought, recognized and used.

As a valuable alternative to the ball "down" on the ground for the scrumhalf's use, what about the option of the ball carrier committing the tackler, or maybe two tacklers, and still getting a clean pass off to a teammate blowing up the field? When it is on, this "pop" pass is great.

The achievement of good ongoing use of the ball through several phases is the subject of this and next month's article.

Limit Options

There are lots of different techniques for a ball carrier and teammates to win ball. Over the years, I have changed what I coach in this regard several times. Sometimes there were complete changes, other times subtle adjustments, but I've always insisted that everyone on the team learn a limited repertoire of contact options.

Currently, my teams do not use the maul as a contact option in attack. When we are tackled, we ruck. The reason for this is one I first wrote in these pages in 1984: Inevitably, in a game, the ball will be on the ground a good portion of the time. Therefore, we have to know how to deal with ball on the ground.

Since there is limited time to teach players what they need to know, I choose to teach how to deal with ball on the ground. Then, in contact, they are taught to put the ball on the ground. This way we can spend the time it would take to work on mauling on other things.

Another reason we prefer rucking to mauling, is that rucked ball is generally quicker and cleaner, and rule changes have discouraged mauling at our level.

Right now we use four options:

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1) Drive in and Down | 2) Drive in and Pop |
| 3) Corkscrew and Down | 4) Corkscrew and Pop |

Drive in and Down

If a ball carrier and team can do this well, they will not lose. We use this technique when the ball carrier has more than one enemy in front of them. It makes no sense in that situation to give the ball to a teammate, who would then be tackled without you. It makes no sense to try and get by one of the tacklers, as the other one will get you and the first one will be in position to take our ball.

In this technique, the ball carrier runs straight into the tackler. If there is more than one tackler, pick one, (smaller, less mean, closer - but pick one). The tackler should be kept between the ball carrier and the goal line.

The ball carrier must get lower than the tackler. At a minimum, the ball carrier's chin must be below the tackler's shoulder.

The ball carrier must get into a low and explosive position just before contact. The feet should be spaced about shoulder width, the knees bent, and the body rotated far enough that one arm, one shoulder, and perhaps one hip, can explode into the tackler, without losing control. The ball is held either with both arms, or with the arm that is turned away from the tackler. The chin is off the chest, the ears are tucked.

The ball carrier must be listening for teammates wanting to help, and looking both for the contact specifics and for support.

(If there is a teammate within seven yards coming on strong, and the ball carrier has eye contact and sufficient control to get off a nice little pop pass, the technique could convert to a "Drive in and Pop." Everything in the two techniques is the same to this point. For right now, however, let's get back to getting down with the ball.)

Remember that our goal is to involve a tackler or several defenders, and have the ball back, under control, on our side. The ball carrier, after trying to explode the tackle, but without losing control, must rip the body down. Getting down should be violent. The ball carrier should strike the ground with the knee then hip then shoulder.

The body should be oriented across the field, with the back towards the opponent's goal. A line drawn from the tackled ball carrier's head to hips should be parallel to the goal line. Only after the ball carrier is on the ground, is the ball placed, with as long a delay as the referee will allow, at arm's length, under control; and with some downward pressure on the ground, at a point straight out from the belly.

During this entire process of contact, going down, and placing the ball, the ball must be protected from the tackler's hands. The interpretation of the laws has recently become clearer. The player on his/her feet has advantages.

If we are going to ground, we must prevent an opponent from getting hands on the ball. Because if an opponent gets hands on the ball, and we go down, we must release the ball to that opponent. Therefore, we must keep our body between the ball and the opponent, often keeping the ball in motion to prevent them from ever getting their hands on it.

If the ball carrier perceives any opponent to be handling our ball, a very violent effort must be made to get those hands off the ball, so that we can release it on our terms, after going to ground.

We have thus far described why we are working on contact skills, and one option for our ball carrier: Engaging the tackler on our terms, and getting to the ground, body across field, placing the ball under control on our side of the breakdown.

What is the role of the first arriving support player? The second? How can these skills be taught effectively and safely? How does one progress from introduction to skills at pace and under pressure? One approach to those questions will be addressed in subsequent issues.

Eagles Play Well Against the Springboks

Some interesting coaching points about the US Eagles Dec. 1st performance against the South African Springboks can be found at.

<http://www.geocities.com/rugbybureau/COACHING.html>

Question:

How did the USA Eagles team play in the USA/Springboks test on 1st December 2001.

Answer:

We, at the RUGBYBUREAU.com, watch the test between the USA Eagles and South Africa with perhaps more interest than most, because of the bond we got with American rugby. We were more than surprised. The scoreline of 43-20 in favour of the Springboks is nothing if you compare the two teams. Remember the one team is a fullblood professional team, while the Eagles are an amateur team with a few club professional players from Europe.

What did the Americans do right?

Firstly they played like a team that wants to play for the honour of their country, and not for their bank balances. They were excellent in the first phases; they scrum well and took good ball in the lineouts. Their rucking and the securing of the loose ball were very good. Their handling skills in the loose was excellent, a plus point if you look at the skills of other developing rugby nations. They tried to stay on their feet in the tight loose more than any other top rugby nations. Why go down and form a ruck, if you can stay on your feet, drive forward and give your backs a fast ball. The Eagles again shows that pickup and drive is one of the best ways to get over the advantage line against strong defensive patterns. For us the USA players looked more athletic and stronger than their opponents.

What then, went wrong if you look at the scoreline of 5 tries against 1 in favour of the Springboks?

Firstly, it is inexcusable in this day and age if an international team still use an outdated defensive pattern. There was no organized defense in the first channel around the rucks and mauls, no double hits to slow down the tackle or rucked ball for the opposition and no urgency to get the defensive line back in position after the Springboks cross the advantage line. With any of the new defensive patterns, which can be mastered in a few hours, the tries in this match could have been reduced to only 2. Another problem is on the attack, where the Eagles still persist with the old fashioned one man stand-off to try and drive over the advantage line. The only way to break down the new defensive lines is to draw defenders out of their defensive channels by using pockets of forwards to attack the advantage lines at different angles. You keep on doing this, till you get that your forwards are running at the opposition backs and when that happen you know you can start spreading the ball wide, because your backs are now running against mostly forward defenders and the openings will then be on the outside. How can these problems be rectified? Just be prepared to borrow from the world. There are many coaches of successful teams from which you can learn and who will be prepared to help you. Remember a good coach is the one that is prepared to look for help, the other one is already dead. America we salute you on this match; learn from your mistakes and this will be a start of something big.

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I hope the efforts of myself and the contributors in providing rugby information, ideas, experiences, etc. have been of interest to you. Please email (sdcohen4@mindspring.com) me anytime with your input, suggestions or comments.

Yours in the true rugby spirit,

Steve Cohen, Coordinator
EPRU Collegiate Program