April 2017

Meeting their match

Alex Ivanisevic  
*Iowa State University*, alexi@iastate.edu

Alixandria Collins  
*Iowa State University*

Hannah Olson  
*Iowa State University*, holson@iastate.edu

Emilee Drost  
*Iowa State University*, ecdrost@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos)

Recommended Citation

Ivanisevic, Alex; Collins, Alixandria; Olson, Hannah; and Drost, Emilee (2017) "Meeting their match," *Ethos:* Vol. 2017 , Article 11.  
Available at: [http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2017/iss3/11](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2017/iss3/11)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Magazines and News at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ethos by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
It’s Wednesday night, and under the fluorescent lights of Lied recreation center, rugby teammates line up parallel to each other. On the coach’s call, one charges toward the other and hooks an arm under a leg while thrusting a shoulder into the torso — the teammate is pinned to the ground. They get up from the turf laughing, the charger helping her teammate up. Then they switch positions, the charger preparing for a turn as the tackling dummy.

Safe tackling is just one of the many techniques the team does drills to perfect at their practices. The Iowa State Women’s Rugby Club practices inside Lied and outside on the rugby field, when weather permits, twice a week throughout the majority of the year. They have a fall and a spring season.

“In the fall it is our competitive season, so we play teams around the midwest and we can advance to playoffs to go to nationals,” says Elizabeth Reding, a senior studying biology and history, member of Alpha Phi sorority and captain of the women’s rugby club. “In the spring we get to play a lot of our tournaments, so it is definitely more of our fun season.”

Reding says that the team of about 30 players plays in the Division 1 league against many schools in the midwest conference. Saturdays are game days for the rugby team. There is an organized schedule for the club’s practices and events, which makes it easy to share the field, practice and play times with the boys rugby team. In the spring, they have tournaments on most weekends and are currently planning a trip to Nashville, Tennessee. The teammates get used to spending a lot of time together.

“It definitely takes a little bit more of an outgoing person to join [rugby] initially,” claims Reding. “We have had some shy girls come on this team and find their voice — they blossom into young, confident people who really know what they want in life.”

Destination Iowa State is a major time for the club to recruit new members and interested players. Clubfest is also a way they have attracted students. It provides time for them to talk about the team and what the sport is like. They recruit both girls who have played the sport before and girls who have never played, nor even know the rules of, the game — rugby remains an unfamiliar sport to many people.

“It’s not something you grow up with, we see football all the time and it’s hard-hitting and there are injuries but you don’t really think about it as much because it’s a game you know,” says Reding. “Not only is rugby a little bit more daunting in the way that we tackle, but also that no one really knows the rules and it is unfamiliar.”
It's Wednesday night, and under the fluorescent lights of Lied recreation center, rugby teammates line up parallel to each other. On the coach's call, one charges toward the other and hooks an arm under a leg while thrusting a shoulder into the torso — the teammate is pinned to the ground. They get up from the turf laughing, the charger helping her teammate up. Then they switch positions, the charger preparing for a turn as the tackling dummy.

Safe tackling is just one of the many techniques the team does drills to perfect at their practices. The Iowa State Women's Rugby Club practices inside Lied and outside on the rugby field, when weather permits, twice a week throughout the majority of the year. They have a fall and a spring season.

"In the fall it is our competitive season, so we play teams around the midwest and we can advance to playoffs to go to nationals," says Elizabeth Reding, a senior studying biology and history, member of Alpha Phi sorority and captain of the women's rugby club. "In the spring we get to play a lot of our tournaments, so it is definitely more of our fun season."

Reding says that the team of about 30 players plays in the Division 1 league against many schools in the midwest conference. Saturdays are game days for the rugby team. There is an organized schedule for the club's practices and events, which makes it easy to share the field, practice and play times with the boys rugby team. In the spring, they have tournaments on most weekends and are currently planning a trip to Nashville, Tennessee. The teammates get used to spending a lot of time together.

"It definitely takes a little bit more of an outgoing person to join [rugby] initially," claims Reding. "We have had some shy girls come on this team and find their voice — they blossom into young, confident people who really know what they want in life."

Destination Iowa State is a major time for the club to recruit new members and interested players. Clubfest is also a way they have attracted students. It provides time for them to talk about the team and what the sport is like. They recruit both girls who have played the sport before and girls who have never played, nor even know the rules of, the game — rugby remains an unfamiliar sport to many people.

"It's not something you grow up with, we see football all the time and it's hard hitting and there are injuries but you don't really think about it as much because it's a game you know," says Reding. "Not only is rugby a little bit more daunting in the way that we tackle, but also that no one really knows the rules and it is unfamiliar."
PAYTON GARTIN IS LIFTED BY HER TEAMMATES DURING AN INDOOR PRACTICE AT LIED RECREATION CENTER.
In some ways rugby can be seen as a relatively new sport to American turf. Not only is the game something that might take some getting used to, but to some people the fact that females play the sport as well and with the same rules as the boys, no padding or helmets worn, might come as a bit of a surprise. Often times, the sport comes with stereotypes.

Reding says that being a rugby player “is another part of your identity and [telling people that] does conjure up certain images and stereotypes.” She explains with amusement, “If I tell people I play rugby some will ask, ‘Oh can you tackle me right here?’ and I say no, no I will not tackle you because I am a civilized person, in a civilized place!”

She says that when you are on the rugby field playing in a match, you leave any tension that occurs during the game — that is something they are very strict about. Whether the Iowa State rugby team is hosting a team or are playing away at another school, after the match takes place, the home team provides food for everyone and all the players get to know one another. It is a bonding experience as much as it is an athletic event.

“You all sit in a big circle and you get to know people, and all the competition from the field really goes away and you really get to know these girls as people, not just as competitors,” says Reding. “It is a really social sport.”

Reding has been playing rugby since she was in high school and thoroughly enjoys the sport for the experiences it has given her. People might have some misconceptions about the sport. She explains, “You don’t really know what rugby is. Come out, try it and see everything past the tackling and everything past what you think it is, and look at the reasons to stay.” She continues, “It is a tough sport! But there is another side to it, and it is such a bonding sport with a close knit society behind it.”

They see the sport as a great way to make friends, as well as a healthy way to relieve stress and aggression.

“This is definitely a space where we encourage that aggressiveness, but we channel it into appropriate channels and we talk about it — being aggressive on the field then being able to switch it off,” says Reding. “To be able to regulate your aggression is an important skill that you learn. It is an important aspect of rugby.”

A key to channeling and maintaining a regulated level of aggression, and attempting to keep players as injury-free as possible, is continuously practicing safe tackling and falling methods. They are adamant about playing this unavoidably rough sport as safely as possible. Every girl in a concussion test before playing and if anyone feels injured, there is no hesitation to take her out of the game and give her the proper attention to ensure she is okay. Reding says the trainers are great and are always there and willing to help with injuries.

“With rugby, your body is your weapon, but your body is also what takes the hits,” explains Reding. “So you’re only going to take the hit as hard as your body is going to let you.”

Liesel Schwartzkopf, the team’s membership chair, strongly agrees with Reding’s thoughts on the positive bonding experience that rugby has given her during her three years on the team.

“I think I have made some lifelong friends being on the team,” says Schwartzkopf. “We have all developed a friendship where any one of us out on that field can pick one of the teammates and we could hang out for the day with no problem.”

With the position she holds in the club, she recruits interested players who would like to get involved with the team or makes her contact information available to them. Schwartzkopf is able to get a first-hand observation of what types of girls typically show interest. The thing is, there is no “type.”

“We get girls from all walks of life. For the most part we get girls with some athletic experience in sports, but we had some girls that all they knew from when they were younger and in high school was dance and cheerleading, then they came here and tried out rugby and thought ‘Oh wow this is a great sport!’ so we get a wide spectrum,” says Schwartzkopf. “The hardest part of coming onto the team is the possibility of not knowing anyone on the team, and that presents the biggest challenge.”

The team welcomes anyone, even if she does not know the basics of the sport. Schwartzkopf says they begin by explaining the rules of the game and demonstrating simple passing techniques to beginners, then build up to teaching tackling and defence.

She experiences similar things to Reding when faced with the stereotypes associated with female rugby players.

“I will go out to the bar and if someone asks me, ‘Do you do anything?’ and I will say that I play rugby, and a guy will then say, ‘Oh I bet you can beat me up!’ and I’ll be like ‘Umm maybe,’” Schwartzkopf says, shaking her head. “They automatically assume you are super strong and aggressive.”

She says that sometimes people will go to the extent of stereotyping your sexuality as being bisexual or homosexual based on the fact that they only associate playing rugby with intense masculinity. But that is not a fair assumption to make.

“We are just like any other women out there, we are doing something we love to do, we can put on a dress and high heels and look like we came straight from the dance floor… we can pay attention to our academics or anything like that,” she says.

Schwartzkopf believes a great way to counteract the stereotypes is to show people what the sport is about and how the teammates are off the field. She says, “Stereotypes are a struggle with many women sports; I think they all struggle with that. It is the unfortunate thing that goes with it.”

The president of the women’s rugby club Maureen Booth agrees with Reding and Schwartzkopf about fighting irritating stereotypes, and learning to enjoy rugby for what it really offers.

“Rugby is a sport for any shape and anybody, any athletic ability too,” Booth explains. “People assume it is just a masculine sport, but we have players who are really feminine. Rugby is for anyone!”