

Rugby's last game of the spring season canceled due to COVID-19

REBECCA ROBINSON
SPORTS EDITOR

The Red Wolves rugby club team was supposed to finish out their season with a game against Life University Saturday. This would have been the team's second chance to play them after losing their first game against Life U two weeks ago. The Red Wolves will not be able to reschedule the game causing an end to their season. The game that was supposed to take place in Marietta, Georgia was canceled due to five A-State players testing positive for the COVID-19 virus on Friday. The team was set to travel early Saturday morning. Last season, as well as this season, has been abnormal for the rugby team. The 2019-2020 season was cut short due to the original start-up of the COVID-19 virus that sent a lot of players home. This season the team faced the first half of the year without a coach and was self-led due to hiring restrictions that COVID-19 had caused. There were also problems traveling and organizing events without a coach. The team faces issues mak-

ing sure they were also fitting the COVID-19 regulations. As COVID-19 vaccinations are given and more places are starting to return to normalcy there are hopes of next season returning to how it normally was. "Last year the same thing kinda happened," A-State rugby player Elvis Circi said. "Throughout this whole semester, we've been dealing with problems like that all because of COVID." Dante Bandoni has played on the team for three seasons. Bandoni still has another season on the team but some of the older players and seniors on the team don't. "It was really unfortunate. We're working hard and practicing everything, building up to the last game of the season especially for the seniors. It was a big game being their last game at A-State," said Bandoni. "Personally, I was pretty upset. The older guys didn't get their last chance on the field." Though the season ended abruptly, the rugby team overcame some of the challenges they were faced with. Between starting the season without a coach, the seniors led the team in the beginning, and with trou-

ble organizing games, the rugby players have grown closer as a team. "I think we have a good strong bond," Bandoni said. "We started out the season without a coach so we had to rely on each other and the seniors to keep the program going and to keep us on track for the games. We really had to work together and trust each other." COVID-19 also gave another push for the team to play better. With fewer chances to play during the year the team had to be de-

termined and motivated. "I think that this year out of all three years that I've been here it has been the tightest we've been," Circi said. "We really had to come together as a group and as a unit to bond and motivate each other to keep practicing and working out." Circi turned the virus into extra motivation. With the worry of each game being canceled the team wanted to make each game worth it. "The way we dealt with it all, we used it as motivation," Circi said. "We used it to drive us. We've made it through all of this weird stuff but we're still here we're playing games. Let's make it worth it and let's win." Another thing the coronavirus affected was the number of fans at rugby games. Some fans didn't show up due to worries about COVID-19.

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The fans that were there were asked to wear masks and physically distance during the games. With vaccines and places slowly opening back up, there will be a slow return of fans back in the stands at games. "The more fans out there the better," Bandoni said. "The better the atmosphere, the

more intense the game gets." For the rugby team and other sports, fans play a big role in getting the team motivated during the game. The return of fans adds more normalcy to the next season. "That's definitely gonna help," Circi said. "The more people we have, the more people cheering on the sidelines, the more support we have I think it drives our performance to be even better because we see what we are doing as worth it." As well as the return of fans, rugby will be able to go and do their normal events and team bonding exercises. Normally the team would work out together but because of COVID-19 guidelines, the team couldn't work out together in the morning. Slowly they will return to that normal routine. "One thing I think we missed out on this year was not being able to work out as a team in the mornings at the gym together," Bandoni said. "Normally that's a good time for team bonding and work-

ing hard together so in the future being able to work out as a team together will be nice." While other groups and teams on campus are able to go back to the old traditions they missed out on, the rugby team is starting a new tradition this year. Under the new coach, the team is now going to have a banquet. The banquet is to send off the seniors and to close out the season on a positive note. At the banquet, certain players will be awarded to honor their hard work throughout the season. Saturday, the rugby players will have their first banquet at Arkansas State to help send off the seniors and award players. "I've been on a couple of other rugby teams and even other sports with banquets," Circi said. I think it's really going to help. I think especially for the seniors as a way to send them off and thank them for their help after everything they've given this semester." Next year the team will start the season fresh with their head coach and COVID restrictions less intense than they were this season. The team will be able to return to normalcy and attend their second Arkansas State rugby banquet.

Drew Morgan | Graphic Design Editor

Women's basketball team hopes to return to normal



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS

The women's basketball team was able to play a majority of their games even with COVID-19

REBECCA ROBINSON
SPORTS EDITOR

The Arkansas State women's basketball team completed their season back in February. Despite COVID-19 the team was still able to play 21 out of the 25 scheduled games. The basketball team, like many other teams, had problems with scheduling what each day was going to look like. With COVID-19 numbers constantly changing teams had to adjust accordingly. "Coaches and student athletes by nature are creatures of habit with a scheduled plan and it was the exact opposite of that," women's basketball head coach Matt Daniel said. "Which made it a complete nightmare,

that was the hardest thing." Athletes were regularly tested for COVID-19. COVID-19 caused the basketball team a lot of uncertainty. "The uncertainty of where you're going to pop positive on a test. Do you go under quarantine, who's in quarantine, who's not in quarantine, why are they in quarantine?," Daniel said. "Is it a close contact quarantine? All the uncertainty was really tough to deal with but, I'm proud of our group and how we handled it." With the possibility of someone being out, athletes had to be ready to play at any moment. COVID-19 can be asymptomatic making it harder to tell if an athlete had it or not. "If somebody walks in on crutches you know they're out but, if somebody has a cough, it could be COVID it could not

be COVID," Daniel said. "The uncertainty with that is don't take it for granted, next persons gotta be ready to go. Everybodys gotta be locked in on any given night and we're better for it." The team has been able to return to a little bit of normalcy after the State Awards. Arkansas State hosted its ninth annual State Awards to recognize student athletes for athletic achievements, academic success and community service. "That was the first event on campus, off campus, work wise or personally that I've been to that felt somewhat normal," Daniel said. "I'm excited to get back on campus and see students on campus and have that energy that we quite frankly didn't have this time." With the State Awards being held there is hope of a return of

Order of the Pack for next year's incoming freshman. That's a tradition A-State didn't have this year due to Covid-19. Normally the stadium would be full of incoming freshmen, alumnus and speakers for the pep rally. "We didn't have a pack pride day (order of the pack) in the stadium," Daniel said. "I think that kinda sets the tone for what the year will be like, I'm looking forward to that." The limits on fan capacity will hopefully be adjusted as well. When last season started the First National Bank Arena had a limited capacity. "My whole goal is to have high fives and handshakes both on the floor and in the crowd," Daniel said. "We want to give them a show. They help us win. So I'm excited to have the energy that they bring back."

Upcoming Events:

Friday:

- Track Maroon & White Invite at Starkville, Mississippi.
- Baseball plays their first game against Austin Peay in Clarksville, Tennessee at 6 p.m.

Saturday:

- Tracks 2nd day of the Maroon & White Invite at Starkville, Missouri.
- Baseball plays their second game in the series against Austin Peay at 6 p.m.

Sunday:

- Baseball plays their third and final game in the series against Austin Peay at 1 p.m.

Tuesday:

- Baseball plays at Ole Miss at 6:30 p.m.

May 7:

- Baseball plays against Georgia Southern in Jonesboro, Arkansas at 6 p.m.

May 8:

- Baseball plays their second game in the series against Georgia Southern at 6 p.m.

May 9:

- Baseball plays their third and final game in the series against Georgia Southern 1 p.m.