

Intro to A-State Rugby

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Rugby exists in a wide arena of sporting content in the US with many fans already having multiple teams to follow, games to watch and endless news to keep up with. As established sports already find themselves ingrained in fan schedules, how does a growing sport like rugby set itself apart and encourage students to not only start sitting on the side lines but also look to try and get on the field?

According to A-State rugby captain Evan Roode, a junior international business major from South Africa, rugby is, “a gentleman’s game in controlled chaos.” A respectful game where you can still see hard hitting contact but leave knowing no grudges are held at the final whistle.

Rugby consists of 15 players on each team, who for two halves of 40 minutes will balance their defensive responsibilities with the need to attack and end the game with the most points scored. Yet, it must be done without passing forward.

At kick off, the flow of the game is fully dictated by those on the pitch as they decide the patterns of play and make high pressure decisions to best progress their team up the field. The power that every player can have is what drew in center Joel Penrose, a junior accounting major from London to the sport. “I got into rugby when I was about 13. I enjoy the freedom and inventive nature of the game that allows us to really put a mark on the sport,” said Penrose.

Being able to thrive on pressure and turn a situation around can be essential in any position but the inside and outside centers do offer a unique perspective. Here, it is the players job to connect the engine of the team in the forwards with the wide, agile backline players. Like the role of any player, defense remains a top priority, to stop the opposition in their tracks with a crushing tackle.

Having separate attacking and defensive systems means at any moment a player must be able to transition and read the field in front of them and look to take advantage of the opposition. It’s clear why Interim Head Coach Dominic Shaw values “independent thinkers” in the team.

“We’ve got a couple of plays and each play has various options. However, it’s not so much about the plays but how players execute them in relation to what the opposition players do,” said Shaw.

The A-State team also offers its players a unique opportunity to compete at the D1A level in the mid-south conference. Alongside the in-state tuition that provides invaluable financial support for earning a degree, there’s also the chance to experience different cultures with a squad from across the globe.

“I think for the most part, people just want a different experience. Maybe it’s exciting to play with international players,” said Shaw.

With a squad of over 40 players, A-State has created a cultural meeting point as players from the United Kingdom, South Africa, Argentina, Spain, Uruguay and the United States, to name but a few, get to live and train together.

“I really love the international aspect to it. It’s like everyone’s welcome. It’s pretty much just like the best because it’s different cultures, different backgrounds, different jokes, you never get the same day in training,” said Roode.

With some players traveling thousands of miles from home, the social side to the sport is more important than ever to help

in the transition to brand-new cultures and unfamiliar surroundings.

“You eat together, you train together, you live together like a pride of lions. Additionally, it’s important to make friendships where you can speak to people you never normally speak to; do things you’d never normally do. There is a lot of opportunity here for players to develop as people and their broaden horizons,”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE RUGBY

are top 10 in the nation. We train five days a week, gym four times a week because we want to win and we still feel the pressure,” said Roode.

Traditionally, sports can be a results-based industry where decisions are made from the results of season or even single fixtures.

“Obviously we want to win a national championship, there’s no doubt about that but it can’t be in my head just yet,” said Shaw.

In fact, Shaw’s main focus for the team is on the development of players both on and off the field as they work hard in their athletic and academic responsibilities.

“We have each player for approximately four years, like Olympic training cycles. We are extremely blessed to have quality support staff, Anja Enstrom (Athletic Trainer) and Dr Brendon Aitken (Physical Therapist) as the support staff. Together we focus on developing players in 3 areas (medical, physical performance and the technical aspects of rugby). I want each player to be the best versions of themselves,” said Shaw.

It’s off the pitch that player development can be most important as those who are willing to learn can leave A-State with good habits. This can include understanding work ethic, time management and juggling multiple responsibilities.

Freshman winger Tim Glatthaar, a business administration major from South Africa, agreed that the team works best when, “we all play for one another, and we all strive for the same goal.”

Shaw’s passion for rugby comes from his motivation to use the sport as a platform to promote good values, something he has seen the power of first hand.

“Growing up in South Africa in the early 90’s, I have witnessed first hand how Rugby has had the power to change a nation, breaking economic and racial barriers. This motivated me to pursue a career in coaching Rugby and using

sport as a platform to promote good values,” said Shaw.

The establishment of Major League Rugby (MLR) presents an opportunity for athletes to play professionally in the states. A professional league will help to increase awareness of the sport across America and discover a new audience away from powerhouse rugby nations.

“I’ve been here two years now and it’s been growing every year. I went to a (MLR) game last year, it was mind boggling to see how many people were there,” said Roode.

Along with professional rugby, there will be the need to perform in international competition.

“I believe that in the next 20 years the United States has the potential to be the best rugby nation in the world. I think there are great systems in place in terms of athletic development. I just think they need to be more specific to rugby from grassroots to the elite level,” said Shaw.

The latest rugby season is reaching a close as A-State look to their next fixture being the quarter finals of the national championship playoffs, as they face conference foe Lindenwood on April 16.

“We’ve had this weekend off to recover and get ready and we are so excited to put it all out there,” said Roode.

RUGBY BASICS:

Rugby terms:

Try: The primary scoring method is where a player places the ball on the ground in the in-goal area between the try line and dead ball line.

Conversion: After a try a team has a chance to convert by kicking the ball between the posts and above the crossbar.

Scrum: Eight forwards from each team bind together and push against each other to get possession of the ball. The team that had possession will have their scrum half feed the ball down into the middle ‘tunnel’ between the two teams.

Line out: Three to seven forwards line up parallel with each other between the five meter and 15 meter line. The hooker of the team in possession throws the ball down the middle of the line out

Ruck: This is formed when the ball is on the ground and two opposing players meet over the ball. The offside line is established as behind the last foot of the last man on each side of the ruck. Players must compete for the ball by driving the opponent out of the area and ruck the ball backwards with their feet.

Positions:

Loose head prop & Tight head prop: Along with a hooker these positions form the front row in the scrum. They are the sides of the row and are also responsible for lifting during a line out.

Hooker: The hooker will coordinate the timing of the scrum and has to win possession by hooking the ball back through the prop’s legs. They also throw the ball during a lineout.

Locks: The second row are the engine room of the scrum and the target men in the lineout.

Flankers: The openside and blindside flankers are all-rounders who are at the center of the action. From winning balls to collecting passes or making tackles of their own, key to victory.

Number 8: Together with the flankers forms the back row. They bind on to the back of the scrum and are the only forward player allowed to pick the ball up from the base of the scrum.

Scrum half: The scrum half is responsible for linking the forwards and backs, being a vital part in building any attack. They control when the ball is fed to the backs. Generally smaller players there is a reliance on protection from the forwards.

Fly Half: The conductor of the team’s back line who control the attack, deciding when to pass to the centers or kick for position. The Fly half must react to gaps in the defense to decide what play to enact. Normally, the designated kicker for conversions, penalties and drop goals.

Wingers: Playing in the widest areas of the field, wingers typically finish off attacks and are vital to defense of this area.

Centre: Centers will look to break the defensive line or draw in enough opposition players to create scoring opportunities. The inside center tends to have more creativity with passing and kicking whereas the outside center is normally faster and needs to offload the ball quickly to the wingers.

Full Back: Lining up behind the defensive line the full back will sweep up any breaks in the defense and must be able to catch high balls and launch attacks after receiving deep kicks from the opposition.

Rugby union team formation

