



Post Penn State Burks Sevens Tournament

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Why You Should Be a Rugger By Matt Smith

Showing up to Loyola as a freshman can be very overwhelming, with the first week being full of icebreakers and important information, trying to find a nice group of friends, and wanting to feel like you're taking advantage of all the opportunities being given to you. If you find yourself in a position like this, allow me and my friends to guide you to arguably the best club team at Loyola.

Rugby is an up-and-coming sport that's slowly entering the mainstream cycle of sports everyday people can easily pick up and enjoy. Imagine a game in which teamwork, communication, and true connections are key features to a good team, rather than other sports that rely entirely on size and skill. While rugby definitely takes skill, it's also an activity open to all body types and levels of skill. My friend Robbie McKnight, a freshman, has mentioned his regretting not joining the team initially in the fall. He played basketball his whole life but never played any contact sports. When I asked him if he wishes he joined in the fall he said, "Yea, I would have because it's a good way to meet people and to keep yourself in activity." Luckily for Robbie, rugby is open for everyone to play and he will have no issue joining his sophomore year and catching up on the game he's been missing.

One of my good friends, Rauri Callaghan, a freshman I met on the team, had zero rugby experience prior to joining the team. He played soccer consistently for eight years through high school as goalie, and in his own words, "I used to love the physical aspect of playing as goalie." He was in a lot of people's shoes of wanting to try something new but being worried about messing up. He tried it out in the fall and has fallen in love with it since. When I asked him as someone who had no experience before Loyola if joining the team has improved his overall college experience he says, "100% because the team just has a bunch of great guys you can just hang out with outside of rugby and rugby as a sport is so much fun and especially during the spring time it keeps you running and active, so [it] just makes the transition a lot easier if you come from high school sports." In high school, Rauri was six practices with three games a week week, so joining a team where practice is only 2-3 times a week and games are scheduled so you can still have a social life makes for an amazing team environment. Don't get me wrong, it's still competitive and we all love to win, but compared to high school sports, the environment is relaxed, which may interest transitioning freshman looking to keep themselves busy while having fun.

Team picture after annual team retreat



My experience with rugby started back with elementary school when I played for Manhattan Rugby, a branch of an organization called Play Rugby USA. Joining this team an hour and a half away (if I was lucky, unreal Belt Parkway traffic) from my hometown of Rockaway Beach unlocked a world I never thought was possible. Some of the friends I made on this team I still see to this day due to rugby being such a connecting sport. Deep connections made through such a presumably violent sport. But how could this be possible? I have found the very idea of winning and losing together to be what brings me closer to the team. The understanding that we as a team are a united collective—no one is in it alone, and we will work harder next time.

Off the field this mentality is essential in college and life. Failing but picking yourself up, finding where you made a mistake, finding a new way to win are key characteristics for success. You learn lessons like this through learning rugby. While you may join,

and rugby may not immediately click, you must stick with it because I promise you there is no greater feeling than running with a rugby ball.

Team events are other great ways for you to make new friends and bond with people off the field. Some team events include hang outs at the rugby house 10 minutes away from campus, award ceremonies, and watch parties for live rugby games. Within my eight months of being at this school, it's safe to say some of my best memories include hanging with the guys and singing funny rugby songs that have been passed down through generations of ruggers. I talk to my friends from other schools about "Songs" only to find out most rugby clubs have songs similar to ours, but still not quite like ours (we are the best at songs). Screaming these songs shoulder to shoulder allows you to learn about the history of rugby in a fun and connecting way that is unlike any other sport.

Even outside of Loyola there are many stories of connections in the business world being made through Loyola Rugby. My Coach Nip, who played four years in college and 20 years with a Men's Club, says, "Without a doubt, the most bonding I ever had was in college and that's where my heart is with rugby and it's what really drove my entire college experience and truthfully the rest of my experience in my life. Rugby's how I got my 1st job, how I met my wife and how I have all my best friends, so I continue to give back to the sport by coaching in college." This quote fully encapsulates how monumental rugby is. While I understand I sound dramatic, during the award ceremonies when had alumni come in and talk to us about the SLOBS and SLOWS (the women are still working on their name) which stands for Society of Loyola Old Boys/Women. This organization is designed to network and get your name out once you graduate. All members of the team are assisted as they will find jobs and can be helped financially if need be. It is a great way for alumni to give back to a sport that means so much to them and anyone who is blessed to play it. Rugby time and time again enters people's lives and introduces the common theme of wanting to give back something to the sport that changed their lives.



Matt Smith '27 post Winter Rugby Formal



Robert Shaw '27 Michael Kemnitz '26 during our Penn State Burks Tournament

"Without a doubt, the most bonding I ever had was in college"

Coach Nip

Joining Loyola Rugby is one of the best decisions I have ever made while in college. The brotherhood that we have is one that is hard to recreate. Our team events will help you build relationships with people you wouldn't normally meet and day-to-day life with prove being a part of a team is so much more than playing a sport—it's rather about the unity formed through playing the sport. You have the feeling and understanding that everyone on the field has your back, which is an important thing to know as a freshman who is looking for a deeper connection. And this doesn't only apply to men I have good news for the women who want to play as well. Not only will you find an almost identical team for women, you can also read Amanda Belmont's "[Hounding the Incoming,](#)" that can better explain what joining the Women's Team is like.