

## SPORTS

# A Breakout Year for Great Falls Rugby

For 2014 season, Eagles look for more new players and coaches.

By THERESA COETZEE

This past summer, there was a new group marching in the Fourth of July parade – 40 or so kids and parents affiliated with Great Falls Rugby. The Eagles even brought along a candy-tossing mascot. Reaction to the new organization varied. “I didn’t know Great Falls had a rugby club;” “I want to sponsor you next year;” and “Do those little kids tackle?” were all overheard. The answer to the later question is, “not the little ones.”

The club’s first appearance in the community’s annual patriotic event was (in a way) symbolic of a breakthrough year. Under the leadership of head coach, Gary Coetzee, and with the financial and laborious support of numerous parents, coaches, and community businesses Great Falls Rugby has begun to make its presence known to Rugby Virginia. Every age group from U7 to U19 placed either 3rd or 4th in Rugby Virginia’s annual summer tournament. This was quite an achievement for a three years young club competing in a Commonwealth-wide, USA Rugby sponsored organization.

Founded in 2011, the club’s first year was marked by a grassroots spirit among a mere 22 players. This year Great Falls Rugby has 92 registered members ranging from age 5 to 19. The club displayed their new kit this season, a major improvement on the previous seasons. Each player received a top quality sublimated practice jersey, and matching shorts, socks and a ball. In addition, the club provided match jerseys for



Great Falls Youth Rugby high school team with coach, Gary Coetzee.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



Great Falls Youth Rugby U-11 team with their coach, Martin Koen, after placing third in the annual Rugby Virginia tournament.

### AREA ROUNDUPS

#### Langley Football Goes to Seven in a Row With Win Over McLean

The Langley Saxons extended their win streak to seven in a row, as they ran the table after a 1-2 start to finish the regular season strong with a victory over archrival McLean, 35-12.

The Saxons built a 21-0 lead on the Highlanders before McLean could get on the scoreboard in the annual “back yard” brawl between teams with players on a first name basis. The win propels the surging Saxons to a five seed in the 16-team 6A North region playoffs on the strength of its 8-2 overall, and 6-1 conference record. Both marks the best performance in over a decade for Langley.

The Saxons used three long drives to build their early lead, going 71 yards on

nine plays, 80 yards on 13 plays, and 51 yards on 10 plays to mount a 21-0 lead with 2:31 left in the second quarter. Tyler West punched in the first two scores on runs 2 and 19 yards, while Phil Antypas caught a 6-yard pass from Nick Casso for the third score. However, after an outstanding kick return by Chris Merrill, it took the Highlanders only two plays to go 36 yards to cut the lead to 21-6 when Gabe Sutherland found pay-dirt on a 19-yard TD gallop. Sutherland had 96 yards on 16 carries for the game. The Langley defense prevented any further damage with a last-second stand as the clock ran out on the first half with the Highlanders threatening again before intermission.

McLean got the ball to start the third period, and promptly marched 75 yards on seven plays, with a 31-yard scoring strike from Danny Hecht to Manny Enriquez-Hesles cutting the Saxons lead to 21-12, but that would be as close as it would get. Hecht completed 4 of 10 passes for 61 yards and one touchdown.

Langley responded to the challenge with

two third quarter scores of their own to expand their lead to 35-12, with Erik Swayne supplying all five extra points.

The long scoring drives (14 plays, 69 yards and 7 plays, 61 yards) were typical of this year’s Langley offense. Behind the confident play of senior quarterback, Nick Casso, Langley’s potent spread/read-option attack has averaged 41 points a game. The balanced mix of run, with the junior West, who had 31 carries for 188 yards and two touchdowns, and gun of Casso, who was 7 of 14 for 76 yards and two touchdowns (Austin Denham’s 17-yard touchdown catch being the clincher), has operated all year behind the Saxons’ dominant offensive line lead by seniors Norris, Kolencik, and Molster; ably assisted by the outstanding play of junior Connor Halm, and sophomore Ben Culmer. With the Langley defense stepping up with big plays, especially senior captains Kevin Fisher (LB) and Garrett Collier (FS), with help from Michael Porter and Brian Pitts, the Saxons have proven to be unbeatable over the back end of the season.

each team at all games. No other club in the Virginia league has managed to match this. “It is important to build a sense of pride and achievement amongst the members and parents of the club,” Coach Coetzee said. “We want our kids to wear their jerseys outside of rugby and encourage their friends to join!”

Coach Coetzee would like to see registration soar past 140 in 2014. “This is an ambitious but achievable goal,” he said. “The problem is that for the younger age groups we are purely a summer sport competing with swim team and family vacations.”

The sport also competes with a perception of violence. But, those who know the game see a youth program that teaches teamwork and provides an exceptional workout. The younger age groups play “touch rugby.” In this version of the game if a player is tagged below the waist he may take two steps but then must pass the ball. Tackling starts at age 11.

According to several studies, the concussion rate in tackle rugby is, surprisingly, lower than for American football. This is due largely to the style of tackle. In fact, some football programs are now promoting and educating young players on rugby style tackle techniques in an effort to reduce injuries.

Looking toward the 2014 season, the Eagles seek opportunities to promote the club throughout the Herndon, Great Falls, Reston, McLean and Sterling areas. They are also looking for both new players and coaches.

For more information please visit [www.greatfallsrugby.com](http://www.greatfallsrugby.com). The club is also on Facebook. For information on Rugby Virginia visit <http://rugbyvirginia.com>.

As a five seed, Langley will host its first playoff game in decades when the visiting Battlefield Bobcats (6-4) come calling on Friday, Nov 15.

#### Langley Ice Hockey Opens with Win

The Langley ice hockey team opened its season with a 12-2 win over the Herndon/West Springfield squad. Langley’s captain, Drew Schneider, notched five goals, while sophomore Jason Guidi had a hat trick and freshman Faisal Alsaif contributed five points with two goals and three assists.

After making it to the state championship and losing six seniors last year, the Saxons debuted eight freshmen with expectations of continued strong play in the upcoming seasons.

The Saxons’ next opponent is Osborne Park on Friday, Nov. 15 at 6:10 p.m. Come out to Skatequest in Reston and cheer on your Langley Saxons.