

SPORTS

Great Falls Rugby Club Heads to Tournament

BY GARY COETZEE
GREAT FALLS YOUTH RUGBY

It is wheels up on March 2 for Great Falls Rugby Club's middle school boys, and they have reason to be optimistic. With the support of the Great Falls Optimists Club, 12 boys will compete in the premier rugby 7s tournaments of the year – The Las Vegas 7s. "I am very grateful to the Great Falls Optimist Club and to all those in the community who have supported our boys' trip to the Vegas 7s. This will be a great opportunity for them to see international rugby up close and to grow both as a team and as individuals on the pitch. Success requires both grit and teamwork," said Gary Coetzee, head coach of Great Falls Rugby Club.

What is rugby 7s? Well, it is that fast-paced, full-field running game that you saw played in the Rio Summer Olympics. Did you know that national champion and New England Patriot, Nate Ebner, played rugby for the U.S. in Rio? With the return of rugby to the Summer Olympics, the United States has seen a surge of interest in this global sport. Rugby has been lauded as a safer alternative to American football. (Cue the old "pads versus no pads" safety debate.) And, some claim it is the fastest growing youth sport in America. This is, perhaps, because until 5th grade, the game is purely a "tag" sport with no tackling but lots and lots of running and teamwork.

Those who spend time in Great Falls Village may have noticed this phenomena playing out at Leo



Santabella field, home base for the Great Falls Rugby Club. Last year a scrum sled showed up to compliment the numerous lacrosse goals dotting the landscape. Great Falls Rugby is celebrating its fifth anniversary this year and has seen steady growth and success since its inception. In 2016 the Club's coed, under-9 "tag" rugby team placed third in Rugby Virginia's statewide tournament. In 2017 the club has added girl's high-school and middle school tackle teams.

The Club is grateful for all of the support that the Great Falls community has shown over the years, particularly for its November benefit tournament. This past November marked the third anniversary of the tournament which raised a significant sum to benefit the spinal cord injury recovery programs at Medstar National Hospital.

Great Falls Rugby plays year round and allows players to pop-in and pop-out throughout the year. Registration is always open and players can join at any time. Summer is the primary season for rugby in Virginia and culminates with a statewide tournament at the end of July – just in time to show up fit for fall sports. For more information about Great Falls Rugby, visit www.rugbyva.com or contact Gary Coetzee at gary@greatfallsrugby.com.

Beatrice Kelly-Russo to Play for Lynchburg College

Local high school senior Beatrice Kelly-Russo has accepted a bid by Lynchburg College to play on its championship woman's soccer team. Soccer has been her passion since starting to play at age 9. She has been goalie for several soccer clubs, Langley High School, Herndon High School, and an indoor team at Sterling SportsPlex, plus she coaches youth soccer there as well.

Kelly-Russo will be joining a successful soccer program at Lynchburg. The team has been invited to the NCAA playoffs every year since 2010. It won successive

ODA Conference championships each year, and went on to capture the Division III National Championship in 2014.

Coach Todd Olson recruited Kelly-Russo early based on her performance at a soccer camp, and offered her a place on the Lynchburg team during her junior year at high school. She was honored for her selection at a "Signing Ceremony" Feb. 10 at Herndon High School.

Kelly-Russo is a high school honor student and has been awarded an academic scholarship by Lynchburg College.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Bea Kelly-Russo and Cpt. Adler signing the intent form for Lynchburg College Women's Soccer.

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