

QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED BY PARENTS ABOUT RUGBY

1. What can my son expect from rugby? Foremost is fun, rugby is a lot of fun. It is a game that requires aerobic fitness, and provides an outlet for youthful energy and athletic expression. Rugby is considered the ultimate "team" game, with camaraderie at centerpiece. Rugby is played in every nation on earth, and is now the most popular club sport on the college campus's, especially among college women club sports.

Joining the local rugby team also brings membership in an international athletic fraternity...a chance to tour and travel, and to establish lifelong friendships with teammates and competition alike.

Playing rugby also helps athletes fine tune skills that are important in other sports such as football, wrestling, lacrosse, soccer and basketball.

2. What is "Pinellas Athletic Club Rugby", how is it organized, and why isn't it affiliated with the school district?

We have opted to remain *unaffiliated* with the school district so that we may offer rugby to student athletes from all local schools...not just one.

ABOUT THE CLUB

If not already, all of our volunteer coaches are encouraged to be certified by USA Rugby, our national governing body, within 12 months of joining.

For more information about rugby can be found at <http://www.usarugby.org>

3. Who is in charge?

Our team is operated by at least one adult who is certified (or has a roadmap to be) by USA Rugby to coach.

4. What can families/parents do to help the rugby program?

Each team needs their families/parents to take turns supplying items like oranges and drinks for matches, and helping to launder the team's jerseys. We want our families to take turns videotaping our home and away matches. We want our parents act as chaperones when the teams travel, and to drive vans or other transportation to rugby events. **We would like our parents' ideas and suggestions.**

We are also in need of parents with medical training (EMT, RN, MD, DC, etc.) to attend matches.

Most of all, we would be thrilled to have as many family members as possible on the sidelines at matches, cheering for the teams and providing fan support.

5. How do High School coaches feel about High School soccer and football athletes playing rugby in the spring?

It depends on which school is involved, and which coach you ask. There is no single answer, and the answers seem to vary a bit from year to year.

We will open lines of communication on this issue with several coaches in our area. Most coaches state they do not object to their football athletes playing rugby, as long as rugby does not interfere with spring weight lifting programs.

Parents and players are encouraged to discuss this issue directly with the coaches at your school.

It may be worth noting that there are dozens of schools in the USA and in Canada where football, soccer and rugby co-exist as varsity sports. Coaches at these schools report that rugby is an excellent off-season sport for football, basketball, hockey and soccer athletes. Be sure to read the article entitled "**How Rugby makes Better Football Athletes**" by sports journalist Alex Goff.

6. When does the season begin and end?

The competitive rugby season begins in January and ends in April - May. There is also optional summer "Sevens" tournaments and All Star programs in June and July.

Optional practices are offered at the approach of spring season. These sessions are designed to be fun, and focus mostly on two-hand touch rugby, fitness and development of basic skills.

Practice starts officially in January at local a lighted field. The goal is to have two practices (two hour) during the weekday evenings. Start times vary depending on the team and the coaches. Matches start in late January and are usually on Saturdays during the day.

The youth rugby season concludes by May (this considers playoff advancement) with local and regional tournaments involving other youth rugby teams. If our team does well, we have a chance to move on to territorial and national championship events in May. Rugby is the only High School age sport that crowns a National Champion.

7. Can my son play other sports and also play rugby?

Yes, of course! Our rugby coaches do *not* support the idea of "single sport, year-round athletes" at the High School level. We believe that student athletes should experience as many sports as possible while they are young and able to do so.

We always encourage our rugby athletes to play fall sports at school, and also a winter sport such as basketball, wrestling or winter track. Athletes engaged in a winter sport may simply join the rugby team upon conclusion of the winter sport program, with absolutely no penalty for having missed our early season practice sessions.

There have been numerous instances in the past where our youth rugby athletes have also played a spring sport at school (baseball, lacrosse, and track) in addition to rugby. We leave this up to the individual player and parents, who are best able to determine whether the athlete has enough time and resources to play two sports at the same time.

8. Do you suspend athletes who are not getting good grades at school?

The Waiver of Liability and Eligibility form in section 4 states: IHSAA code will apply for eligibility to play. The IHSAA states: "The athlete must be passing 5 of 7 solid classes" and a player not meeting the minimum demands will not be allowed to continue with the team. This Pinellas Athletic Club has no formal or informal arrangements are in place with any public schools regarding monitoring of grades. We do encourage every player to maintain their grades first priority and play sports afterwards. We rely on our parents to monitor the status of their children and encourage them to inform us if grades fall below passing the recommended 5 of 7 solid classes. If this is the case a player status can be adjusted to inactive until grades rebound.

9. Is there a team fundraising obligation?

No. Since we receive no financial or other support from any school district, our teams are dependent upon corporate partnerships/sponsorship and athlete dues to fund basic operational costs. We depend upon participation fees and fundraising to pay the costs of tours and travel. However, participation in tours and travel events is 100% optional.

Thus, no athlete or parent is "required" to participate in fundraising activities.

Players who wish to attend tours and travel events are given an opportunity to raise most or all of the necessary funds through organized fundraising programs. If a player wants to attend a tour or travel event, but does not wish to engage in fundraising, then the player may "opt out" and pay a flat fee to cover his or her tour/travel expenses.

No player is penalized in any way if he or she decides to "opt out" of a tour or travel event.

10. Is there any college scholarship money available for rugby athletes?

Several universities offer partial scholarships and grants to rugby athletes, including Penn State University.

11. What kind of equipment is needed to play rugby, and what is the cost?

One of the great things about rugby is that there is very little equipment needed. All you really need is a patch of grass, five or six players, and a ball...and you can play rugby.

Athletes may wish to buy rugby cleats (\$45-\$90). Football or soccer shoes will suffice if the player does not wish to buy rugby cleats, but the front cleat must be removed. It is also recommended that each player buy his or her own rugby ball to practice with (\$20), but this is not required.

The club supplies jerseys, the player must supply rugby shorts, socks and a mouth guard.

Rugby gear may be purchased on line and in sport stores.

12. How much are individual member dues for the season, and how are they spent?

Contact us for the current team membership cost. This pays for the player's jersey, field paint, field rental, practice lights, Referee fees and incidentals during the course of the season.

Confidential payment plans are available for players on a tight budget. Dues may be waived on a confidential basis in instances of serious financial hardship, and fundraisers are in place to assist players with paying dues.

13. SAFETY IN THE TACKLE: How can these kids play "football" without wearing pads or helmets?

It is very important to recognize that rugby athletes are *not* playing football. They are playing rugby, and there is a big difference. The ball is the same general shape as in football, but that is where the similarities end.

Most of the thousands of injuries suffered each year in football result from dangerous techniques that are only encouraged by the wearing of so-called "protective" gear. Since rugby tackling requires a "grapple-and-wrap" tackle (as in wrestling) there is no need for helmets and pads.

Further, there is absolutely no blocking in rugby, and therefore fewer injuries to knees and ankles as a result of poor or illegal blocking tactics.

Rugby tackling is very different than football tackling, and is much more like a "takedown" in wrestling. All rugby athletes are taught to tackle and be tackled safely, before they are allowed to participate in contact practices and matches.

You will not see in rugby the "spearing" type of tackle that is encouraged in football. Football athletes are taught to launch their bodies, and to use their helmets and shoulder pads as weapons. In rugby, there is no spearing permitted, and no tackling allowed by grabbing or hitting above the tackled athlete's chest area. Such tactics are strictly illegal in rugby, and will result in an immediate ejection from the match, plus a suspension for up to three future matches.

Rugby athletes are strictly required to wrap their arms around the ball carrier when making a tackle ...no cross-armed impacts, no purposeful head-on-head collisions, no initiation of contact with the head and neck. It is also important to understand that the ball carrier in rugby is **not** striving for the extra yard necessary to make a first down as is often the case in the gridiron game.

Many football injuries occur when the ball carrier is clutching the ball very tightly to avoid a fumble, while driving forward, head down, just to pound out the extra yard, foot or inch needed to reach the first down marker. In football, would-be tacklers likewise drive forward and launch their bodies, head down, in an effort to put their "weapons" (helmet and shoulder pads) between the ball carrier and the first-down marker, or to dislodge the ball and cause a fumble. And that is how most injuries occur in gridiron football.

In football, the bigger and more violent the collision, the less chance there is of a first down, and the more likely there will be a fumble. This is how thousands of football athletes suffer serious head and spinal injuries each year, despite being equipped with heavy shoulder pads and hard plastic helmets. But the violent collisions in football help to sell tickets and generate vast TV audiences.

There are no first downs in rugby. And no fumbles either. Rugby is all about passing.

Rugby is a fast-flowing game of continuous motion. Rugby is based on teamwork, and quick passing ("recycling") of the ball to supporting teammates. Rugby is not focused on individual efforts, or gaining an extra few inches, or crushing a ball carrier. A rugby athlete who is about to be tackled (or who is in the process of being tackled) is primarily interested in passing or rolling the ball back to a supporting athlete. The tackled athlete wants to get rid of the ball, not hold on to it and take additional "hits" in an effort to gain a few more inches. In this way, the rugby ball remains actively in play, and the tackle situation (if one arises at all) is quickly and safely concluded.

Soft "cloth-and-foam" headgear and soft shoulder pads are now available for optional use in rugby. Current data as to the safety and efficacy of these items is inconclusive. The decision on whether to purchase and use these items is up to the athlete and his or her parents.

14. Are there a lot of injuries in rugby?

No, there is a tremendous amount of misinformation on this important issue. Most of this misinformation is given out by folks who know little or nothing about rugby, or who are often personally "invested" in sports that they perceive as competing with rugby for talented athletes.

Coaches and officials involved in "traditional" sports tend to promote their own interests, and protect their own "turf".

However, and contrary to popular belief, there are actually very few serious injuries in rugby. As with all contact sports, there are bumps and bruises, and occasional sprains, concussions and fractures.

True, rugby is a contact sport, and a vigorous one. However, the rate of serious injury in rugby is less than that experienced in other contact sports, such as football and ice hockey. The rate of serious injuries in rugby is roughly comparable to that in soccer and lacrosse, and substantially less than in sports like skiing, in-line skating and skateboarding.

15. What happens if my son is injured during a match or practice?

Injuries do occur in rugby, just as they occur in any contact sport. A fully stocked first aid kit is always on hand to treat minor injuries, (i.e. bumps, bruises and minor cuts and scrapes). Athletes are responsible for reporting minor injuries to their parents. However, injuries that are suspected to be more serious in nature (i.e. fractures, larger cuts, concussions, and serious sprains) are reported immediately to the player's parent or guardian by the coach.

A cell phone is present at all practices and matches in the event of an emergency. A community ambulance is sometimes present at matches (when volunteer coverage is available), or is at least

available nearby.

Our teams can not presently afford to hire and pay a professional athletic trainer, an EMT, or a team physician on a regular basis. Certified trainers are present at some matches, and some tournaments, but not at all events. Appropriate action will of course be taken in the event that an injury requires emergency attention, and a parent cannot be located.

At the beginning of the season, all parents are required to fill out a form, so as to provide emergency contact information. Parents are also requested to sign a Medical Authorization form in the event that emergency treatment is needed and a parent can not be located on an immediate basis to authorize such treatment.

16. Does the club provide medical or disability insurance?

No, **Pinellas Athletic Club** does *not* provide medical or disability insurance of any kind to any of its athletes or coaches. No rugby club in the entire USA provides such insurance to its athletes or coaches, at any age level. No medical or disability insurance is provided for our rugby athletes by any school or school district. **Each rugby athlete must arrange for his or her own coverage through his or her family, and this applies to all RFC teams.**

17. How much travel is involved?

Many of our team matches are within an hour. Currently, our North Florida division contains teams from Tampa and to the north. The South Florida contains teams South of Tampa.

If a team wins its entire local and regional matches, that team will be invited to the USA National Championship, which is held at alternating locations in the USA each May.

Participation in rugby travel and "Tour" events is 100% optional. Athletes are given an opportunity to raise money to help pay for their travel. The club will often operate various fundraising events to help defray travel expenses.

18. Who is in charge when the team goes on overnight trips?

The ultimate responsibility for supervision of the athletes rests upon the head coach of the team with regard to all rugby activities, including team travel. This is a responsibility that is taken very seriously. After all, most of our coaches are also parents.

In addition to the head coach, parent chaperones and at least one assistant coach typically travel with the team on overnight trips. Parents must sign a permission slip, and are provided with a comprehensive Trip Itinerary and telephone contact information in the event of an emergency.

All athletes and their parents are required to review and sign a comprehensive "**Code of Conduct**" in connection with each travel event. Horseplay, and the possession, transport or use of drugs and/or alcohol are strictly forbidden and will not be tolerated. Players who misbehave or violate the Code of Conduct are removed from the travel event and either segregated from the team (under supervision) or sent home, at the option of the coaching staff, and at the parent's expense.

The club reserves the right to permanently revoke or suspend all membership privileges in the event of serious misconduct, including especially the possession, transport or use of drugs or alcohol.

19. Does the club provide transportation to and from "away" matches?

Sometimes, but not always. The club can not always afford to rent buses or vans on a regular basis. Ordinarily, team travel to "away" matches is by carpool. Carpool vehicles are operated by coaches,

parents and (in some instances) by the athletes themselves. Every effort is made to avoid situations where athletes are operating carpool vehicles, but this is not always possible. Much depends on the level of parental support being offered to the team.

Parents should be sure to discuss travel plans with their athletes, including the identity of the person who will be driving. **Pinellas Athletic Club** is not responsible for the actions of persons operating carpool vehicles.

For trips involving long distance travel, the club will usually arrange for a rented buses or vans. Buses are operated by professional drivers. Vans are operated by adult club members, coaches and parent chaperones. Athletes are sometimes asked to "chip in" so as to help pay for the vans or buses.

20. Do the teams have drug and alcohol policies in place?

Yes, Absolutely. See answer 19, above. Drug and alcohol use **will not be tolerated**, and is strictly forbidden in connection with all rugby practices, matches, tours and events. Athletes who are suspected of possessing, transporting or using drugs or alcohol are suspended from the team on an immediate basis, pending parental consultation. The club reserves the right to permanently terminate the membership privilege of any athlete suspected of possessing, transporting or using drugs or alcohol in connection with any rugby practice, match or other event.

Further, if a coach suspects that an athlete may be involved in drug or alcohol use outside of rugby events, the situation will be brought to the attention of the athlete's parent or guardian, immediately, and on a confidential basis.

21. How much time is spent on rugby on a weekly basis?

Our teams generally engage in 2 afternoon or evening practices per week, usually lasting about two hours per session. Matches are typically held on Saturday afternoons. Thus, the average time investment per week is about seven hours on rugby, not including travel. No player is penalized in any way if he or she needs to skip rugby practices or matches in order to study, or to attend family, school or church events.

In addition to the seven or so hours of "team time" mentioned above, athletes are strongly encouraged to engage in a personal fitness program on their own, outside of practice. Rugby is much more fun when the participant is fit.

22. Are there any special considerations for female rugby athletes?

Yes, Female rugby athletes practice and compete separately from male rugby athletes. There is no "co-ed" rugby, except for occasional two-hand touch rugby games and drills during the off-season. Boys and girls may, on rare occasions, participate in strictly **non-contact** rugby drills during some practice sessions, under the direct supervision of qualified and certified adult coaches. Currently there are very few girls' rugby teams in Florida, but this is expected to grow.

There are no special variations in the rules of rugby for female athletes. Girls tackle and get tackled just as boys do, and tend to practice and compete with the same level of intensity as their male counterparts. In fact, some might argue that high school aged female athletes are more focused on learning rugby skills and tactics than are their male counterparts.

It is interesting to note that Women's' rugby is now by far the most popular club sport on the American college campus. The NCAA has recognized Women's Rugby as an "Emerging Sport" at the college level, thereby paving the way for potential athletic scholarships under Title IX. Further, the USA National Women's' Rugby team won a recent World Championship, and is consistently ranked in the top levels of international rugby. The 2001 "International Player of the Year" was a young female athlete from California.