

RugbyTown® Rising

RugbyTown Rising is an ongoing series dedicated to sharing the past, present and future story of the nation's only municipally-owned rugby team and their home sports complex.

Building A Legacy

by Eiden Herring

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

With the completion of the stadium at *Infinity Park* under their belts, Mike Dunafon and the newly formed *Raptors* organization had taken a big step toward incorporating rugby into the community, but it was only just the beginning.

Construction was also under way on the *Infinity Park Event Center (IPEC)* and the *Glendale Sports Center*, which would further connect the greater Colorado community to rugby and the City of Glendale. Furthermore, preparations were under way to demolish a handful of aged, structurally deteriorating apartment buildings to create the park area and turf field that lie just south of the main stadium complex. There were also plans to create a *High Altitude Training Center (HATC)* for rugby athletes within the firehouse building.

Completing The Next Phase

As fate would have it, the Sports Center was completed first and opened its doors to the community on July 5, 2008. The facility (which is managed by the *YMCA of Metropolitan Denver*) boasts top of the line cardio and weight equipment, a childcare center, a myriad of group classes as well as personal training and fitness assessment services, for a very low membership fee.

The sports center also provides the community with a teen center, *SilverSneakers®* programs, outdoor tennis courts and basketball courts. Prior to the opening of the HATC, the Raptors routinely used the sports center for their fitness regiment, which allowed the conversation about rugby to expand, once again, into the community.

The *Boy Scouts of America* had the honor of hosting the first event at IPEC upon its completion just a few months later in November. Like its sister the Sports Center, IPEC boasts state-of-the-art equipment and provides the community with indoor and outdoor spaces for meetings, weddings and other special events.

Hosts can fully customize their event and even have the option of full event production — the event staff is on hand to help make the vision a reality.

Raptors On The March

With all of the construction activity taking place around the stadium, it's easy to forget that rugby started up again in February for the Raptors men's and women's teams. Spring 2008 would mark the very first competitive season for the newly formed men's team, and everyone was eager to see how far their talents could take them.

The men's team was placed in the highly competitive *West Region* for Division I competition. The Raptors found themselves stacked against the *Denver Barbarians*, the *Denver Highlanders*, the *Gentlemen of Aspen* and *Boulder RFC* — all talented teams with experienced players — for in-state league play alone. Outside of Colorado they would also face some stiff competition from teams in Utah and Kansas.

Training, dedication and focus saw Glendale through to the playoffs. They were the underdog and managed to upset some of the best teams in the country to reach the

national championship match, held on their home turf at *Infinity Park*.

They found themselves stacked up against the *LIFE Running Eagles*, a Georgia-based team that is consistently among the top in the nation. At the end of 80 minutes, LIFE had won the National Championship but the effort put forth by the Raptors — a first year team — was the stuff sports movies are made of.

Placing so highly their first competitive season allowed the Raptors to put their mark on men's rugby, and having such a high profile event held in the City of Glendale was just another way Dunafon's dream of a revitalized community was becoming a tangible reality.

The women entered the 2008 spring season looking to grow their player pool and improve their skills as a whole in advance

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Glendale residents enjoyed the Grand Opening celebration for the Glendale Sports Center on July 5, 2008.

"One of the time-honored traditions of rugby, is the nature of those in the rugby community to include and embrace all who show support, whether that be by stepping onto the pitch as a player, or cheering from the stands," said Glendale Mayor Mike Dunafon. "It's an extended family, and that is exactly what we hope to share with not only the Glendale community, but with everyone, who sets foot in the Infinity Park Complex."

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Colorado Ballet Offers Dance Classes This Spring

Registration has opened for *Colorado Ballet Academy's* spring semester of dance classes for adults and children. The semester runs from January 21 to May 17 at the *Colorado Ballet Studios* at 1278 Lincoln St. The Academy provides training to students ages three through adult, beginner through professional. Open classes for students who want to have a more flexible and less-intensive training experience is also being offered this spring. Information: www.coloradoballet.org/academy.

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of their competitive season which would kick off in August. They played several friendly matches against the other women's teams in the area, and traveled to a couple of less-competitive tournaments within the region.

Word of the emerging rugby-specific complex and the quality of the Glendale coaching staff was spreading like wildfire through the rugby community, and both teams began to see the benefits of this in the form of highly talented players moving to the area to play for their team.

Several of the women were selected for the West All-Star team for 7s and 15s, and a few were even named to the USA Women's Eagles player pool. By the time the competitive fall season kicked off, the Division I Raptors women's team played host

to some impressive rugby talent.

The campaign for a National Championship title did not play out as well for the women as it had earlier in the year for the men. The ladies made the initial playoff cut, but were unable to finish ranked as highly as their counterparts. They sat in eighth place overall, with the Berkeley All Blues winning the championship for the 12th time since 1994.

More quickly than many would expect, the Infinity Park complex was being completed piece by piece. Accompanying the impressive community-oriented project were two promising rugby clubs composed of some national-level athletic talent. The hunt for a National Championship title had just begun for the Raptors, and the legacy of RugbyTown USA was only just beginning.



The Glendale Raptor Women come together before kick-off of every match just as they did on September 23, 2007.



The Glendale Raptors made it to the national championship match in their inaugural competitive season.



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