

# Rugby World Cup Aids Popularity And Raptors

by Marco Cummings

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

Other sports stake their own claim to the title of the "world's game," but without a doubt, it's been Rugby that has captured the attention of eyes throughout the world this fall with the *Rugby World Cup* returning to the sport's birth country.

Glendale Raptors head coach Andre Snyman was there to catch an early glimpse of the scene as one of several participants in a charity match hosted by *Rugby Aid* in London, England. Snyman competed alongside several former rugby world stars and pop culture icons as part of the event, which was held in support of the *Rugby for Heroes* charity. The charity supports military personnel who are making the transition back to civilian life.

"It was a great experience and for a great cause: It helps military folks with the transition to the normal world," Snyman said of the experience. "We had more than 10,000 supporters at the game watching us play."

All in all, the event proved to be a light-hearted and enjoyable affair for the participants, one which supported a noble cause but also provided a glimpse of what London had to offer as the hosting city of the Rugby World Cup.

"The atmosphere is absolutely fabulous," Snyman said. "Everywhere there are people talking about it. Underground in the trains there are posters. There's a big vibe and everyone is asking what game you're going to watch. Everyone is getting their TVs and news set up for rugby. It's going to be a great World Cup."

While Snyman got a taste of this year's World Cup buzz, two of his players were blessed to witness the events firsthand, up close and personally. Raptors Zach Fenoglio and Niku Kruger were among the names selected to the 31-man USA World Cup roster. The USA Eagles were one of 20 nations competing during the six-week tournament.

"Making the World Cup squad truly is a dream come true. It was something I set



Photo by Travis Prior  
Glendale Raptors captain Zach Fenoglio takes the ball upfield for the USA Eagles at the Rugby World Cup in London, England against stiff competition in Pool B.

my sights on five years ago and it is surreal to see those goals met now," Fenoglio said of his selection. "When you first start playing rugby you always imagine what it would be like to play on the World Cup stage and now to have had this opportunity is something I'll cherish forever."

"Zach has been a hard worker since his initial selection onto our A side (lower-level Eagle) three years ago. Despite some disappointing squad omissions, Zach continued to remain positive in his approach, and eventually he became a regular squad member for us," said

USA Eagles head coach Mike Tolkin. "His leadership role with the Raptors has helped him become a confident player with the Eagles."

International play gave Fenoglio, a Denver native and longtime Raptor, time to mesh with Kruger, who will enter next season as one of Glendale's newest roster additions when the Raptors look to defend their *Pacific Rugby Premiership* title in 2016.

"I chose Glendale because of the professionalism and culture the club has. I have followed Glendale for a couple of years and really enjoyed the way they played and presented themselves," Kruger explained. "Then when I spoke to coach Andre [Snyman] and learned of his love and enthusiasm for the game I knew it was the place I wanted to further my rugby career."

"It has been great getting to work with Niku, he's a very talented and knowledgeable player of the game," Fenoglio added. "It's been great seeing him develop with the Eagles and I know he'll bring great value and leadership to Glendale next season. Bringing someone of the talent and rugby background will only help grow and better our team."

Fenoglio and Kruger also played alongside several other PRP players as teammates for the Eagles.

"It shows there's a quality of our league," explained Snyman. "We have these international players playing in the PRP and it shows the quality we're playing against. It shows well for the U.S. and hopefully there will be more players coming through the ranks."

The pair were part of a USA team which featured 20 World Cup debutants, but played several international matches in preparation for the Rugby World Cup.

"In terms of Rugby World Cup experience, yes, this is a relatively inexperienced group," USA Men's Eagles head coach Tolkin said. "However, while the Rugby World Cup is a whole different kettle of fish, many of these players do have a fair bit of international play under their belts since 2011."

Drawn in *Pool B* alongside opposing teams Samoa, Scotland, South Africa and Japan, the Eagles had a rough go in this year's tournament, a campaign which saw a winless record. But win or lose, representing one's country at the highest level was a badge of honor for Glendale's participants.

"As a player, I want to ensure that every time I step into that field I represent my country to the best of my ability and hard top quality rugby," said Kruger.

It also provided a valuable learning experience; one that Snyman hopes to apply to the upcoming domestic campaign.

"From a coaching point of view, I'll be looking at these games for new ideas, new structures and the way they do things," He said. "As a coach you always look to find ways to improve and be different."



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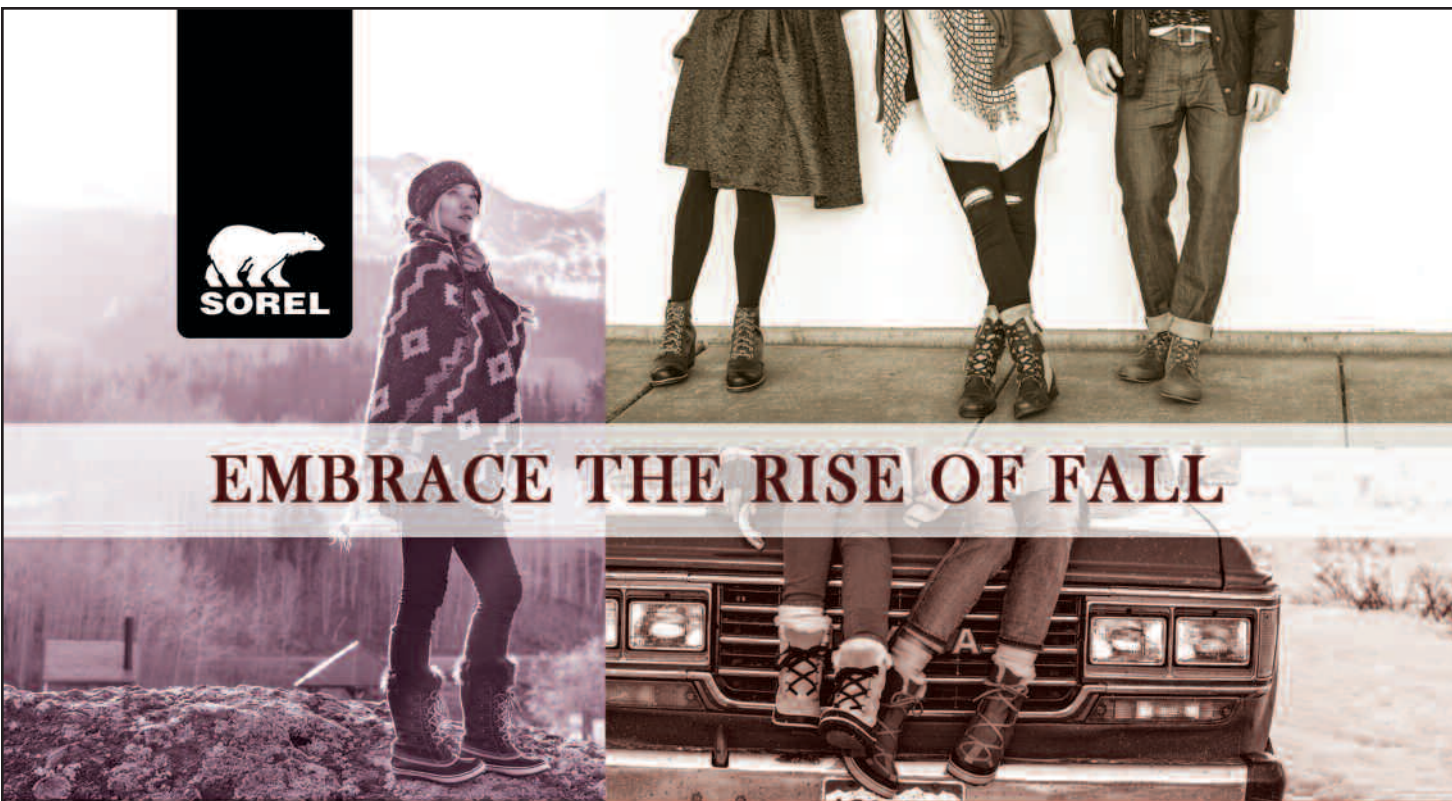
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