

Glendale Raptors Women Repeat As National Champions

by Kurt Woock

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

If a successful season is defined as one in which a team improves from where they started, then the women of the *Glendale Raptors* didn't disappoint. If it's defined as one in which the team's fan base continues to support the team and grow ever larger, then 2015 was a good year. If to have a successful season a team must bring home a championship trophy, well, the Glendale Raptors did that, too. 2015 was great. And so are the Raptors.

The Raptors began 2015 as the defending *Women's Premier League (WPL)* champions. The road to the championship in 2014 went through a game forfeited by the opposing team. Narratives in sports often fall outside the bounds of what teams are capable of controlling, and this was no different. However, teams don't get to choose their challenges. They just need to overcome them. So, in 2015, the Raptors set out to show the country they've earned their spot at the top.

The 2015 regular season finished with the Raptors atop the *Blue Conference*. The Raptors brought a balanced attack, finishing the season second in the league in point differential. The only loss on their record came on the road at the hands of the *Berkeley All Blues*, who narrowly beat the Raptors in early October. But, in a moment that encapsulated the entire season, the Raptors rose to the challenge when, a few weeks later, they defeated the Blues in another close game.



The Glendale Raptors Women celebrate their back-to-back national championships with a 26-17 victory over the Berkeley All Blues at Infinity Park. Photos by Seth McConnell

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Joanna Kitlinski of the Glendale Raptors was named MVP for her play during the Women's Premier League National Championships.

The Raptors muscled their way into the championship with a few statement wins.

Their opponent in the match was a familiar foe — the Blues. "Based on the last two times these are two pretty even teams," coach Mark Bullock said before the game. "They're a heavyweight and we're a heavyweight." Bullock said that, in order to win, his team needed to be "physical and relentless." They were just that. Up 15-5 at the half, the Raptors never looked back, winning the game and the WPL trophy, 26-17. The Raptors were led by the outstanding defensive play of Joanna Kitlinski, who was named MVP.

The championship was the cap to a season that was successful in many respects. Total attendance approached 4,000 in *Infinity Park*, and the Raptors continued to attract huge crowds online, with more than 25,000 people from more than 90 countries tuning in. Between games, fans followed the team, as the Raptors' website saw over 72,000 views during the season.

As they continue to build a winning tradition in Glendale, the Raptors have shown they're not afraid to set the bar high, and they have the dedication and passion needed to reach it. Their fans — and opponents — are taking notice. As the Glendale Raptors set their sights on 2016, eyes from around the world will be watching.

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