

Glendale Raptors Rugby Continues To Soar And Showcase Club Depth

by Marco Cummings

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

Just before the halfway point of their 2016 Pacific Rugby Premiership (PRP) campaign, the Glendale Raptors record remains an unblemished 5-0 in league play. With a handful of dominating performances to start their season, the Raptors find themselves on familiar footing atop the PRP table and look poised for a repeat of their championship performance from 2015.

"I'm very happy with where the team is at the moment," Raptors head coach Andre Snyman said following a 63-7 victory over Belmont Shore to open up the team's slate of home games in March.

It's been coming together quicker than expected for the Raptors' gaffer, which has given both the team and the coaching staff confidence as they look to finish the season strong.

"From a coaching standpoint, I think it took us the whole season to try and get the whole team prepared for the Final last season. It took us 10 games to get the guys all

on the same page," Snyman explained. "This season, for some reason, it just feels to us that the team is all on the same page after five games. In terms of chemistry, the environment and the way they've trained, it's been better. That's great."

The challenge is maintaining that momentum for the games remaining in the PRP regular season.

"The downside is trying to keep it there and not get complacent," Snyman explained. "It's halfway through the season. They can't switch off and assume it's going to be a highway cruise to the final."

But the Raptors have dealt with their fair share of challenges thus far, including a rigorous four-game road tilt to start the season.

"Obviously it's four weeks in a row of travel. It takes its toll on the boys," Snyman said of the challenge. "It's tough, but I'm proud of the boys for sticking to it."

In addition to the rigors of travel, Glendale has had to deal with the challenge of missing some of its best players for the early

Joash Peko of the Glendale Raptors takes the ball into contact against Belmont Shore during the 63-7 victory in week seven of the Pacific Rugby Premiership.



part of the season. Raptors captain Zach Fenoglio, along with young talents Chad London, Niku Kruger and Hanco Germishuys missed the first four games of the PRP season while taking part in the America's Rugby Championship with the USA Eagles.

Despite this, the Raptors didn't miss a beat, winning all four of those matches on the road. It's been a testament to the depth that Snyman and his staff have built within the club.

"We anticipated it," he said of the absence of his USA Eagle players. "We had a good idea which players would be a part of it and we trained accordingly. We've tried to bring future players into those positions and we've been very fortunate to have depth within the club. It's very good."

International duty still often comes at a price to the club, however. Fenoglio suffered a neck injury while with the Eagles at last year's Rugby World Cup. The ailment lingered throughout the start of the season until Fenoglio made his debut in 40 minutes of action against Belmont.

"It was nice to see him back on the field with his leadership and the way he played coming off of an injury," Snyman said of Fenoglio's performance in that game. "He

looks good. He's not 100 percent fit but he's working really hard on that. He played a solid 40 minutes."

Additionally, the high profile of international rugby has made Glendale's best players targets for the newly formed Professional Rugby Organization (PRO Rugby).

"Unfortunately we're going to lose those players with the PRO league. Niku, Chad and Hanco won't be playing with us," Snyman said. "We're in a fortunate position that the players that took their place are the same players that are going to step up and finish the season for us. I'm confident that the players are good enough to keep the momentum moving forward."

Overcoming adversity is as much a part of rugby as overcoming one's opponent. If the Raptors' early returns are any indication of what lies ahead, this year's team looks to be primed for another run to the final.

"You can't just run on the field and expect to win. You've got to always be prepared for a fight," Snyman concluded. "We're just going to focus on the task at hand. We're going to take things a game at a time and edge our way closer and closer to a position in the final."



Photos by Seth McConnell

Glendale Raptor Martin Knoetze scores a league leading try (worth 5 points) against Pacific Rugby Premiership competition Belmont Shore.



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