

# Football, soccer make up democratic sport of rugby

By Frank Byers  
Of the Emerald

Americans think rugby only is played in countries where people drink tea at 4 p.m., but the game has enthusiastic devotees throughout the United States and here at the University. "Fun is the reason I play rugby, the same reason anyone goes skiing or does anything else," said Nate Meads, a University sophomore and member of the University Rugby Club.

Rugby is hard to describe in standard sports terms. According to Reese Loney, another player, "It's a combination of soccer and football and whatever else you can think of." Unlike American football, there is no protective equipment, and the ball cannot be passed forward.

Senior Doug Giles played high school football for four years. "I didn't like the 'winning is everything' attitude, and I think it's bad for kids to have that forced upon them by some coach," he said. Giles began to play rugby two days a week for 15 weeks and, after traveling to England, decided rugby was his sport.

The field size varies, but is usually about 60 by 100 meters. Goals are never wider than 22 meters. As few as seven may play on a side, but 15 is the normal team size. There are two 40-minute halves.

Rugby is a true team sport. "Everybody plays a full part in every aspect of the game, and everybody gets a chance to work with the ball," Giles said.

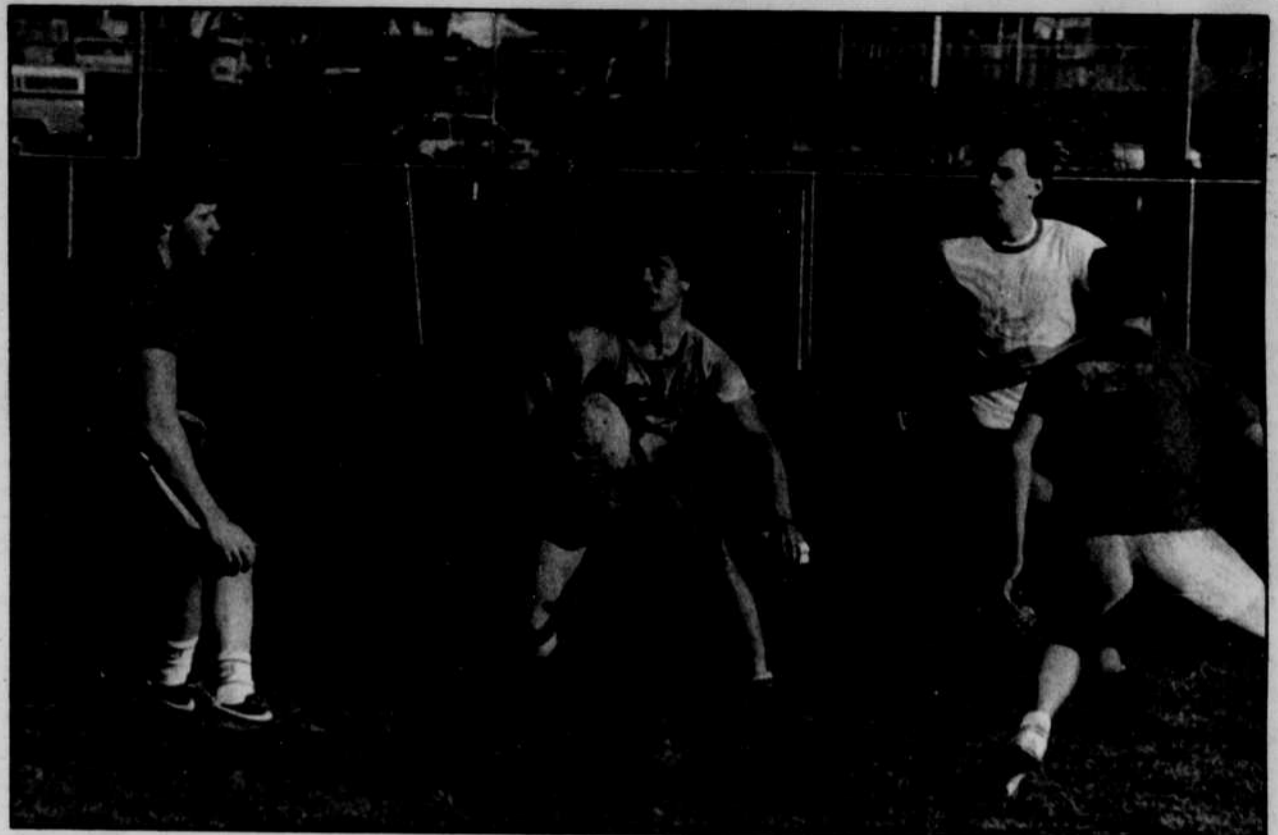
The game begins with a scrum, or "scrum," as in American football. Eight forwards from each team comprise the "forward pack," which tries to win the ball by walking over it. To do this, the teams shove each other, trying to push back the opposing team.

As Meads puts it, "kicking the ball in the scrum is erratic play and accomplishes nothing. Rugby is a thinking man's game more than anything."

A team's forward pack is a very cohesive unit. Said Meads, "they eat together and they drink together," and they do everything else a man has to do, together.

The remaining seven players on the team make up the backline. "Backs basically try to score the ball," said Loney. "They also have to ruck and maul, but they run with the ball the most." Rucking and mauling are similar to a set scrum, except this usually occurs after a player is tackled, and both teams jockey for position to "walk over the ball."

The rules make for a wild, yet controlled game. A player must release the ball when tackled, and he can kick forward at any time. "Rugby is safer than American football," said Meads. "Because it's a contact sport, there is an element of risk involved, but it's relatively safe."



Nathan Meads sets up for a pass while Peter Meier offers support in a passing drill as the University Rugby Club plays a practice game of "touch" rugby. Photo by Bobbie La

To score, the ball must be carried across the goal line and touched to the ground. The ball can also be kicked across the goal line and touched on the ground by another player.

While rugby players have designated roles, they are by no means self-absorbed. "There's a strong sense of rugby fellowship, and that's why teams party so much," said Meads. "On a field that is really symbiotic, each player has to know what his teammates are doing."

The democratic attitude of rugby works to everyone's benefit. "The rivalry found in American football just doesn't exist in rugby," said Giles. "You play hard against your opponents on a field, but after the game you have a beer with them."

Some players are better than others, but "you don't have gross distortions in ability," said Meads.

The University Rugby Club is part of the Northwest Collegiate Rugby Football Association, which includes teams from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Canada. Each team plays seven games during late winter and

early spring, and in late spring, the top three teams go to the western regionals in Santa Barbara, Calif.

Logically enough, rugby was born in 1823 at Rugby School in England. "They were playing soccer, and a kid picked up the ball and ran with it," said Loney. The student, William Webb Ellis, was tackled and the ball sprang loose.

The club will be in Bend on March 7 and at Reed College in Portland on April 11. Oregon will host Washington State University March 14, with the University of Idaho coming to campus the following day. The Ducks will also play the Eugene Gentlemen's rugby club on April 25.

"We always welcome anyone who wants to come out for practice, and we don't put a lot of pressure on people," said Giles. "A lot of the players are out there learning, and the environment is not negatively intense."

The club practices every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 3:30 p.m. on the intramural field behind the tennis courts. The players will be glad to answer any questions.

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