

## **Navy Rugby 2003-2023 ( Sam Marrone)**

My son Mac, class of 2006, was a good rugby player and played for Navy.

Carl (Fulford) and I would watch the games on Hospital Point and talk about rugby.

Great game, tailor made for the service academies.

Ultimate team sport, all 15 players can participate in all phases of the game.

Physicality, athleticism, quick decision making throughout the flow of the game.

Cal Berkeley was a varsity program and Army was considering varsity status and subsequently did elevate.

Why not Navy ( one of the top tier college teams) and what could we do to help initiate the process.

Fall 2003

Scheduled a meeting with AD Chet Gladchuk and newly sworn in Supe, Rod Rempt '66 to state the case for elevating the men's and women's rugby programs to varsity under the direction of one individual. We always considered the men's and women's programs should be viewed in the same light. Varsity vs club: a significant difference at Navy with NAAA fully committed.

Their proposal: Wanted Hospital Point for intramurals and would provide three fields at Greenbury Point

Game pitch, practice pitch and a turf pitch. Permanent stands. Electronic scoreboard.

Men's and women's locker rooms at the Brigade Sports Complex.

Cost- \$2M. Better get to work.

Thanks to the generosity of A.Jon and Patti Prusmack '66 , Ernie and Sharon Blake '64 and a few others we raised the money in about 2 months. I think we **SURPRISED** Chet and Rod

Carl, Ernie, and Andre Simonpietri '66 played on the inaugural 1963 Navy Rugby team. Ernie was on Plebe Detail for the 14<sup>th</sup> Company. Carl and I were plebes in the 14<sup>th</sup> Co.

A.Jon was a rugby enthusiast and pioneer. He introduced me to rugby after I resigned my commission in the Marine Corps and relocated to New York City to work. We played on the Westchester Rugby Club for several years. Jon had already written books on rugby and was publishing a monthly rugby newspaper. Jon eventually bought the franchise for the USA 7's tournament in the US and negotiated TV contracts first with ABC and then NBC. He was a truly a dedicated promoter of the sport and one of the most instrumental and creative entrepreneurs in raising the level of awareness of rugby in the US. The rugby community is forever grateful.

2004-2017

The team continued to excel on the field of play. We reorganized the Navy Rugby Alumni Association to focus primarily on fund raising. We were successful in fundraising since the first \$2M was really a downpayment on the continual requests for financial support. Continued to lobby anyone who could assist in elevating the status of rugby (primarily the AD and Supe).

2017

Mike Flanagan long time, 27 years, successful coach retires. 2023 inductee to the USA Rugby Hall of Fame. Most deserving and all of Navy rugby very proud.

Chet hires Gavin Hickie as Director of Rugby responsible for both men and women.

Resume: 2003; graduates from University College, Dublin, Ireland.

Professional career as player: Leinster, Ireland; English Premier League, London Irish RFC, Worcester Warriors, Leicester Tigers.

2007: Coaching career: Forwards coach Leicester Academy ( established to develop players for Leicester Tigers and England national team). Relocated to U.S.; Asst Coach Belmont Shore Rugby Club in southern California, Head Coach. Woodrow Wilson High School, Long Beach, California ; 2012 Head Coach Dartmouth College. Various coaching assignments for USA Eagles (National team); 2017 Director of Rugby, USNA

2017- 2021-22; Record 40-13, Conor McNerney won Rudy Scholz Award presented to the best men's collegiate rugby player (rugby's Heisman Trophy) first midshipman to win the award. Sarah Skinner won the M.A. Sorensen Award, presented to the best women's collegiate rugby player, first midshipman to win the award. Sarah is a recipient of a Rhodes Scholarship. Women win Division-1 Fall (15's) Championship.

Autum 2021: Chet announces that the rugby programs (men and women) through hard work and dedication as club sports had earned varsity team status beginning in the 2022-23 season. The Superintendent VADM Sean Buck concurred.

Spring 2022: Gavin and Chet hire James Willocks Assistant Director of Rugby/Director of Recruiting (native of New Zealand; rugby mecca of the southern hemisphere) Impressive player resume. Asst. Coach Dartmouth College, Head Coach Penn State back to Dartmouth as Head Coach. Coaches professionally for MLR (Major League Rugby) teams New England Free Jacks and Old Glory DC.

2022-23 season: First year Varsity

Record: Undefeated 18-0

Beat Army 3 times and Cal Berkeley twice, second time in Houston for the D-1a National Championship ( 1<sup>st</sup> time for Navy), Lewis Grey second midshipman to win the Rudy Scholtz Award. Lewis is the recipient of the NAAA Sword for Men, presented to the midshipman in the graduating class to have personally excelled in athletics during his years of varsity competition. Women repeat as D-1 Fall Champions.

Rugby is in a good place at Navy but can't rest on its laurels. It won't look backward with Gavin Hickie at the helm. Onward and upward.

**Go Navy**