The scholarship and high performance opportunities in college rugby are continuously increasing, and three schools are seriously upping their games in that area, but doing it a little bit differently than some of the newer varsity or quasi varsity programs out there have.

Furman University in Greenville, SC and Spring Hill College in Mobile, Ala. have parlayed already existent traditional clubs on campus into new opportunities, while Simpson College in Indianola, IA is starting a new program that's focusing solely on 7s.

Spring Hill

Davenport, Lindenwood, American International College, Notre Dame College and Wheeling Jesuit all started their varsity or quasi varsity programs from scratch. They didn't take the bunch of students already wearing mismatched jerseys on campus, start funding them more seriously and running a professional outfit.

But that's essentially what Spring Hill College has done. The men's NSCRO program already existed, but the university saw an opportunity to boost admission by taking a few club sports, like bowling and rugby, a little more seriously.

"The school looked at their recruiting efforts and marketing efforts and they decided to focus on athletics and put a little more resources into fringe athletic teams, move those teams under the athletic department in an effort to provide resources and inevitably create more admissions for the school in general," new Spring Hill full-time head coach Mollie McCarthy said.

Spring Hill is a Jesuit Liberal Arts college with an undergraduate enrollment of about 1,300 students. The School doesn't recognize the rugby program as varsity, but it will be fully funded, overseen by the athletic department and McCarthy, formerly the coach development director for USA Rugby, has scholarships available for men and women. The women's team doesn't already exist on campus, but McCarthy hopes to field the school's first women's side in the fall of 2013.

"We'll have to travel quite a bit. I don't know if 7s is what we're going to focus on first, just to get the interest," said McCarthy, "but we're definitely going to have to travel to Louisiana, Florida to get games, since there's not much in terms of the Alabama, Mississippi area, which will be a little bit difficult, but that's the goal is to really start recruiting for it and get a team together for the fall season."

Also interesting is that Spring Hill will remain in the NSCRO. Davenport played its first competitive season in DI-AA, winning the National Championship. Lindenwood played its first season in DII, winning a National Championship. AIC was very competitive in DII its first year and competitive in DI-AA its second. Wheeling Jesuit has started as an independent DI-AA team. Only Spring Hill and Notre Dame College have gone the NSCRO route.

"We're staying NSCRO until we are organized and competitive enough. That's not to say we wouldn't look to advance," said McCarthy. "The school itself is NAIA, but we're applying to

NCAA Division 2, so everything here is a timely process. I think once the school moves into NCAA DII, I think club sports would heavily want to follow suit, rugby would want to follow suit. We're not, right away, expecting to be competing at the top, top level. Our goal, really right now, is build the program and build the name and move up after we have the structure in place."

Furman

Furman has traditionally been a really competitive DIII program, but the Paladins recently moved up to DII. With strong financial backing from alumni and friends, a rugby-specific stadium was built on campus in 2008. Taking another big step forward, this time with financial support from the school, Furman now has $400,000 in scholarships to use over the next four years.

"The school's going to provide $100,000 each year over the next four years for financial aid for rugby players. And then I'm hoping to raise another $100,000 from our alumni and friends and parents," said Furman coach John Roberts, who also works as communication director in Furman's department of marketing and public relations.

"Now that we've transitioned into DII, we're a small school, and I went to our president and some key folks in our university, admission folks, financial aid folks, and said we're moving up to DII now, and if we're going to be championship competitive on a national scale, as we have been with DIII, then I'm going to need a little help…They understand the value of rugby here, and what it brings to our student life, so I went in and asked for a small amount, and our president was much more supportive than I thought he would be."

Roberts is hopeful the school will see the value in its initial $400,000 investment and re-commit more down the line.

Simpson

In Iowa, former Cal player and international referee Chris Draper has developed high school rugby at a miraculous rate. Simpson College, a Methodist Liberal Arts college, has taken notice and will start a quasi varsity men's program this fall. There are no scholarships on offer, but the program is funded and paying a coach – Jake Norlin.

The unique thing about Simpson is it's focusing on 7s. The team of current Simpson students has been recruited by Norlin using several different on-campus tools, and only a couple of the current players have rugby experience. Simpson has scheduled some 7s round-robins with Midwest schools and is on the search for more matches.

Draper pitched the idea of a sponsored rugby program to several small schools in Iowa, and Simpson was the only one with a sympathetic ear. Draper's professional relationship with the school's president was a positive factor.

"What we provide for Simpson, is obviously what any other small school is looking at. They have kids who are on the football team or were on the football team. We have three guys who are on the football team now who were playing rugby for us in our high school league. If these kids stop playing football or stop playing any other sport, a lot of them leave the school," said Draper.

"If we can retain one kid for one semester, we've broken even based on the investment the school is making already. If we retain two, we're turning a profit for the school. So, it becomes a very simple metric for them that if we can start taking kids who are looking to go to school in Iowa, giving them a pathway for a sporting option that a lot of our kids are looking to continue with, for them it's very profitable very quickly. For them, it's a very straight up ROI situation."

Draper, who was largely a forward at Cal, has taken Iowa's high school rugby player population from less than 30 to over 500 using 7s.

"I think it's something where we're a little ahead of the time, but that's the way things are going," said Draper.

"We need to be training 7s athletes if we're going to be winning Gold, and I think that's really my personal goal, because I think that's where we can compete in the world…People see 7s on TV, they don't see 15s. When these school administrators, when they saw rugby on NBC, they're seeing 7s, they're seeing Olympics, and that's what we're able to deliver for them."

How much did the Iowa high school rugby explosion play into Simpson's decision to start a program?

"My first instinct is to say 100-percent, and I'm trying to justify ways to come down from there…This would not have even been a discussion if we hadn't had as many high school kids playing rugby as we have," said Draper.

"At a school like Simpson where they have 1,500 kids, 680 of them are athletes, so they really do invest heavily in athletics, you're looking at a situation where if they have 10 extra kids every year, that's a massive year. 10 kids is worth $300,000 to them potentially."

Summary
The addition of Simpson and Spring Hill to the roll call RUGBYMag's count of varsity or quasi varsity rugby programs to 18 across 16 states. Many more schools offer some type of scholarship or financial aid for rugby players. Here is our list varsity or quasi varsity programs:

Spring Hill (AL) Men & Women
Simpson (IA) Men only
Lindenwood (MO) Men & Women
Davenport (MI) Men & Women
Life (GA) Men only
American International College (MA) Men & Women
Wheeling Jesuit (WV) Men only
Notre Dame College (OH) Men & Women
Cal (CA) Men only
Eastern Illinois (IL) Women only
Norwich (VT) Men & Women
Harvard (MA) Women only
Bowdoin (ME) Women only
Cal Maritime (CA) Men
Vassar (NY) Men & Women
Quinnipiac (CT) Women
West Chester (PA) Women
New England College (NH)