

Youth Rugby Growing in Southern Illinois

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A Small milestone was reached on November 1st in the small town of Germantown Hills, Ill. Cory McHugh became the 1000th Graduate of the Rookie Rugby Program in the Peoria Area.

He received shirts and bags from the local high school rugby teams and became an honorary captain of the Peoria men's Rugby Football Club. The Rookie Rugby Program is being supported by the PRFC as part of their community outreach program.

"Our goal was to introduce non-contact rugby to 500 students by the end of the year. That goal was reached by the beginning of October and currently over 1,200 kids have gone through the program," said Coach Sparrenburg, high school coach and lead instructor of the local program. "Every Class has been a success story and a great advertisement for future classes".

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The teachers in the area have had a surprise as well.

"Students who like to sit back and watch the world go by are finding success with this sport. They have broken out of their shell and are moving/scoring like I have never seen them before," said Becky Harbors, physical education teacher at Metamora Middle School. "I wish this opportunity was available sooner".

Coach Sparrenburg wasn't surprised that the students were having fun, but at which students were excelling.

"I didn't realize that by introducing a sport that no one had played, let alone seen before, I put all the students on an even playing field maybe for the first time since they were in kindergarten," he said. "It didn't matter how well you did at other sports, this was rugby. No one knew what they were doing at first. Those that were used to being picked last were stepping up and outdoing the stereotypical athletes of the group."

Not just the teachers, but the students are speaking up. "She talks about rugby constantly! Every night she tells us all the details of the rugby she played." says Amanda Wright about her 6th grade daughter from Metamora. "She says, 'Mom, this is my thing. This is the most fun I've ever had in P.E. I Love It."

Rookie Rugby is designed to be played co-ed, which sometimes allows an all Boys vs. all Girls scenario. "I love to see the girls go up against the boys. By the end of the week, the girls are consistently beating the boys," said Sparrenburg. "Once they get the confidence, they usually can out think the boys instead of trying to outrun them"

Being Double Goal Coaching certified through the Positive Coaching Alliance, Coach Sparrenburg includes life lessons as well as rugby lessons. "He teaches sportsmanship and respect along with the laws of the game," Trent Jorden, PE Teacher at Hollis Elementary, said.

Rookie Rugby is designed to not only teach the laws of the sport, but also re-enforce traits society wants to see in their youth sports. "The students realize quickly that arguing a referee's call, show boating or trash talking is not accepted in youth rugby."

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"I would hope that all schools would take this type of opportunity and run with it," said Sparrenburg. "Not only does it get the kids moving and keeps them active, but teaches leadership and making quick decisions on the move".

This benefit is being noticed at both the Private and Public School levels, all the way from the PE teacher to the Superintendent. "I've only heard positives about the program, and I know our staff is excited about getting rugby integrated into our curriculum for the long-term" District 69 Superintendent Dan Mair said.

If you would like to get Rookie Rugby into your school, email PlayRugby@PeoriaRugby.com or your local men's club for more information