Written by Pat Clifton
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UC Davis hosts Cal Poly Saturday in a preseason friendly. It will be the first hit-out of the new year for both sides following a full fall 7s season.

“It has been a bit of a challenge trying to juggle the 7s fall season and 15s, where you’re trying to bring new guys in. I know we had a tough time trying to keep two programs running simultaneously,” said Davis coach Andrew Acosta.

“I’m sure other programs had the same growing pains. Us being a quarter school, we started school on Monday and there was a tournament that Saturday and three more the next three weeks. So it was a lot of rugby to stuff in.”

Davis has graduated Sam Shackelford, the four-year starter and standout, and opposing teams will be happy they don’t have to face him again. But returning are three leaders with plenty of experience – captain and second row Kevin Holland-McCann, president and fullback Richard Galvin and Will Kopas.

They’ve also added what could turn out to be a promising freshman class. Three guys join the team with high school experience – Josh Farnsworth (Rancho Cordoba), Ryan Morgan (Bellarmine) and Eric Pawlakos (Lamorinda). And starting in the centers are Justin Woo and Bobby Moir, freshmen.

“They have a lot of promise,” said Acosta of Woo and Moir. “They played 7s for us last fall, so they’re new to the game, but they’re athletes and they’ve picked it up. Hopefully they’ll be able to pick up a lot more over the next month.”

Plenty of alumni will be in town for the match this weekend, so it’s important Davis shows well, but more important is getting ready for California Conference play, which begins in February.

“We want to do well, but we’re really trying to focus on a pattern of play because we kick off our season against St. Mary’s, and we all know what they’re about,” said Acosta.

“So we’re really trying to focus on just building over the next month to put our best 15 together for the St. Mary’s game so they understand what our pattern is, what we’re trying to achieve.”