

## Denver Highlanders, Queen City, Un-Merge

Written by Bill Gleason  
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The merger of the Denver Highlanders and Queen City Rugby Football Club, that created Denver Rugby, came to an end on Nov. 1, 2012 when club members voted to return to the traditional banners under which the two sides existed for four decades.

Suffering from a lack of players, the clubs merged in 2009 as a way of survival. The combined effort allowed Denver Rugby to field two sides. The Division I side played under the Denver Highlanders name while the Division II side sported the orange and black of the Queen City Rams.

Initially, the merger did exactly what it was supposed to do, according to Denver Highlander president Paul Mason. The numbers swelled for the first two seasons and Denver Rugby was competitive in the tough ERRFU region.

However, along with strong numbers for the current team came the loss of two traditions from the Rocky Mountain region as well as the loss of one cub from the schedule for all areas teams.

Surrounded by pictures of past teams, trophies and framed jersey's on the walls of the Highlanders home bar, The Irish Hound, Mason said, "After three years it was evident that the merger, while successful at first, had alienated two proud clubs. Queen City, which has 40 years of history, and the Denver Highlanders, with 45 years, were losing their identity."

Under the ambiguous name of Denver Rugby the clubs that were once stalwarts of the Colorado rugby landscape also began losing the connection with their respective strong, and large Old Boys networks and as the financial and moral support that comes with those.

A vote was called for Nov. 1.

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“At that meeting I asked how many people where wearing Denver Rugby gear,” said Mason. “No one at the meeting was. I asked how many people where wearing Queen City or Highlanders gear. There was only five. It was clear to me that not only were people not buying into Denver Rugby, but that we were quickly losing the tradition of both clubs.”

The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of disbanding Denver Rugby and returning to the Denver Highlanders and Queen City Rams.

“The reality of the split is that it had to happen,” said Highlanders Coach Nigel Smith.

Although it was not an easy decision, Smith said the leadership of the Denver Highlanders is working on plans to strengthen the club both on and off the field.

“As the Highlanders, we are focused on moving forward, but we will support Queen City in anyway that we can,” said Smith. “We have a plan to move forward. We are going to run it like a business and return to the tradition of the club,” said Smith.

Mason said the club will focus on fiscal responsibility as well as improving its standing in the community with public relation efforts.

On the field, Smith will focus on the recruitment of players, both domestically and internationally. As a coach, Smith is exploring new game plans and the club recently came to a agreement with Kyle Gallian of F.I.T.T. Faction who has developed a 10-week, rugby specific training program specifically for the Highlander players.

“We are going to have a very professional approach going forward,” said Smith. “We are looking for new ways to train players and coaches.”

As for Queen City, Mason and Smith said every effort will be made to help Queen City reestablish itself as a competitive club.