

## Former Pennsylvania Governor Promotes CRC

Written by Press Release

Wednesday, 01 June 2011 13:05

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*This column was originally run in the Philadelphia Daily News and on their online portal, Philly.com. The author, Former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, writes a weekly sports column for the Daily News from a fan's perspective. His column appears Wednesdays.*

IF YOU'RE fed up with the NFL lockout, if you think it's just a dispute between billionaires and millionaires, but the thought of not having a football season is still too much for you to bear, I have some advice. Head down to PPL Park in Chester on Saturday and Sunday and check out the USA Sevens Collegiate Rugby Championship.

Yes, I said go watch a rugby tournament. Despite the fact that there are about 2,500 rugby clubs in the United States, including a number in our area, most Eagles fans know little or nothing about this fast-paced, rugged sport. What little we may know comes from watching Matt Damon and Morgan Freeman in the film "Invictus," which told the inspiring story of how South Africa's winning of the Rugby World Cup helped unite the previously socially divided country. The Rugby World Cup is played with traditional rules and 15-man teams. The Collegiate Rugby Championship to be played in Chester features a newer, even more exciting version of this ancient sport.

Rugby sevens, as it is known, creates a wilder, more wide-open form of rugby, as each team has only seven players who must attempt to defend a full-size rugby field (which is 30 percent bigger than a football field).

Because of the incredible pace and intensity of the game, each match consists of two 7-minute halves. With only seven players on each side, you're likely to see a lot of man-on-man hits, and players can go the distance with one shifty move or a broken tackle. Given the exciting nature of the game, rugby sevens has become immensely popular in a short period of time, and it has been made an official sport at the 2016 Summer Olympics.

This weekend, 16 of the top men's college teams will play 39 matches over 2 days to determine the national champion. The field for the championship will showcase teams from some of the most accomplished athletic programs in the country, including Arizona, Boston College, Cal,

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LSU, UNC, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and local favorites Army, Navy, Notre Dame, Penn State and Temple. This incredible assemblage of players represents some of the talent pool from which the 2016 U.S. Olympic team will be drawn. An eight-team women's tournament also will take place, with Penn State, Temple and Princeton among the competitors. Each match will be won or lost in only 14 minutes, and I can assure you that if you love football, you will love rugby!

Dan Lyle, the executive vice president of USA Sevens, played tight end at VMI and was offered a contract by the Minnesota Vikings in 1996. He chose to pass up the deal and eventually went to Europe to play rugby, and because of his size (6-5, 252 pounds) he became known as "Captain America."

I asked Lyle to compare rugby and football, and he said that they are basically "kissing cousins." The similarities: When a player carries the ball into the end zone and touches it down, it is known as a "try" and is worth five points; after a try is scored, there is a chance to score two points with a conversion kick, which is attempted from the spot the ball was touched down (extra point - this can get tricky if a player is tackled in the end zone near the side line); a penalty kick can be attempted after an infraction (field goal), and is worth three points if good, but it must be dropkicked; if a penalty occurs rather than a lesser infraction, the kick may be taken off a tee; lastly, a player can be stopped only by tackling (although tackling too high is an infraction).

There are, however, some differences:

- \* First, the players do not wear pads. (Think, football with no pads? Incredible.)
  
- \* Second, you cannot pass the ball forward but every player can pass (think, seven QBs) the ball backward (a lateral to another player).
  
- \* Third, there are no downs - it is free-flowing, with few stoppages of play, so that the action rarely ceases. The "scrums" you might have seen happen only after infractions, but when a player is tackled, a makeshift scrum can ensue as the other team tries to grab the ball, while players from the team with possession try to block opposing players and pass the ball backward to another player.

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\* Fourth, American football is a collision sport, so despite the pads, there are more serious injuries. In rugby, tackling is key and you absolutely have to wrap up (Asante Samuel need not apply).

So treat yourself and your family to this whirlwind, exciting tournament. It will help you forget about Jerry Jones, Roger Goodell, et al. Tickets are incredibly cheap by NFL standards, and it will be a great deal of fun.

(Full disclosure, my son's management company is providing marketing, promotions and media relations services to USA Sevens in connection with the event.)

There's one more major reason you should come to PPL Park this weekend: With NBC Sports targeting the Collegiate Rugby Championship as one of its franchise events, with live coverage on both days, and with the fact that NBC plans to have Philly host the event indefinitely, we can own this event for years to come if we have sellout crowds.

In addition to the event's obvious economic stimulus - with college students and alumni coming in from across the country, the game's rising popularity and its acceptance into the 2016 Olympics - the game will increase Philadelphia's growing prominence on the international sports scene (adding to the inroads made by the Union in soccer).

In fact, a main reason we missed out on our previous bid to host the Olympics was our lack of international sporting events. The Collegiate Rugby Championship can become another of the area's marquee sporting events, along with the Army-Navy Game, the Dad Vail Regatta, the Penn Relays, the International Cycling Championship, the National Dog Show (in Philly through 2019, with 20 million viewers - you knew I had to sneak this in) and the Winter Classic. All of these can combine to make Philadelphia the greatest sports town in America.

The tournament's theme is "the toughest sport in the toughest town." Let's show once again why we really are the best and the toughest sports fans in the country. \*

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Have a question or topic for a future column? We want to hear from you. Send an email to [askthehgov@phillynews.com](mailto:askthehgov@phillynews.com)