

After loss, Alfred Rugby takes the field again



By Tyler Parke '10

The Alfred University Rugby Club is back on the field after the tragic death of Dr. Jeff Hollier (AU class of '88), a former standout player for Alfred.

Rugby was once a very popular sport on the Alfred University campus and after looking back into the archives, it is easy to see why. In its first four years the rugby team amassed a record of 79-38-5 and earned second place in the 30-member NYS Rugby Conference championships. Alfred Rugby was considered an up-and-coming powerhouse. Four players on that squad were named to the state All-Star Team in the spring of 1990.

Alfred native and University graduate Bill Pulos (AU class of 1977) founded the team and until he retired after the fall season of 1990, the team never had a losing season.

The rugby squad started with very little. It had no official field or uniform and its first practices were held on a makeshift field far from campus.

“I mowed a portion of my father’s land, which became our first practice location” Pulos said. It was muddy and uneven, but it was all they had and they made it work. Even with a lack of equipment or coaching experience, Pulos kept the team organized.

Alumnus Carter King, AU class of 1987, stressed that the team was very organized despite the challenges it faced. “Coach Pulos made sure that we ran a top-notch club. We played by the rules, we competed hard, and we paid our dues to the rugby union. We also policed ourselves and followed the University policies. We cleaned up trash after home matches and represented the University well at away matches.”

Pulos made it his goal to give his team and the sport of rugby a more professional image. The reputation of rugby at that point was barbaric at best. Pulos wanted to change the perception of the game and to help his players achieve the right attitude on and off the field.

Under the coach’s direction, players were to give 100 percent and to take pride in the effort they gave each day. Despite the challenges the rugby team faced early on, its dedication and love for the game, along with natural talent and athleticism, led it to success.

One player that truly embraced the sport of rugby was Jeff Hollier. Hollier was a graduate of Angelica Central School, Angelica, NY (Allegany County) and attended Alfred University majoring in psychology. He was introduced to the sport of rugby in 1985 by Coach Pulos and was hooked from the start. Coming from a soccer background, Hollier made a smooth transition to rugby and instantly became a key member of the Alfred squad.

During Hollier’s time on the team, the squad went 25-11-3 and Hollier was named the 1987-88 Upstate Rugby Union of New York Academic Athlete of the Year, earning a

3.9 GPA (grade point average out of a possible 4.0) during his four years at Alfred. Hollier is considered one of the most successful rugby players in Western New York and according to Coach Pulos "was a cut above the rest."

Moving from Alfred, Hollier took his game to the University of Virginia where he became an all-star, playing on several national teams and international tours while earning a doctoral degree. Most recently, Hollier was director of Neurological Education at Penn State College of Medicine in Hershey, PA.

Coach Pulos resigned as head coach after the fall 1990 season and his leadership and organization lingered for a number of years before the team eventually seemed to lose direction. It "sort of fell off the map" and even lost its "good standing" status from the NYS Rugby Conference, which led to fewer players and a downslide for the program itself.

Sadly, it was an unfortunate event that moved the rugby squad at Alfred University back in the right direction. The tragic death of the once all-star Hollier hit a nerve with the retired Coach Pulos. Hollier was a great friend to the coach and his death was unexpected. While taking a stroll through AU's campus with his wife last fall, Pulos noticed a flyer posted recruiting students for the rugby club. After much deliberation, he decided that coming out of retirement to coach the team would be a great way for him to deal with his emotions of the loss and a way to remember his friend. The help was much needed and Pulos was welcomed by the students as someone who could set the team back on track.

Today, the rugby club today has a much different look than when it started. In the beginning, there was greater participation among students which allowed the team to have multiple squads of players. Students were all from Alfred University and many of them were members of Greek organizations. Today, the team is comprised of both Alfred University and Alfred State College students. The continuing lack of numbers through the years pressured the club to look outside the University for more participation.



The AU Rugby team pitched in and helped John Ninos move equipment out of the basement of the water damaged Collegiate to the new location.
Photo by Darcy Pulos.

Since regaining Coach Pulos last fall, the rugby squad has worked hard to build a positive public image. Because it was just recently reinstated, the team was only able to schedule a few fall matches with plans for more this spring. Unlike varsity sports, the teams have to make their own schedules. The team plans on six to seven matches from the third week in March until the end of April. It also plans to continue hosting the alumni game this year, which has been a big success in the past. The game is proposed to take place in Alfred on Hot Dog Day, April 25.

The rugby squad has also volunteered in a number of public service events. Most recently, on Feb. 28, the team worked with local business owner John Ninos to help clear out the old Collegiate Restaurant location of old appliances and debris left behind by the Oct. 29, 2009 fire which left the building on Main Street rented by The Collegiate in disrepair.

On a rainy Saturday this past October, members of Alfred Rugby went through the town of Alfred, including Alfred State and University campuses, and picked up as much trash as they could find. The team was able to collect 20 bags of garbage, trash and waste, including tires, glass, cans, a car battery, and an old satellite dish. Members even took time to help the Alfred State construction crew load its trucks.

At a recent Everclear concert at Alfred University, the team used its size and muscle and worked security for the event.

One project that is still in the works for the rugby squad is a joint venture with Alfred University and the Schools Without Walls (SWW) program in Rochester, NY. SWW is an alternative education institution whose majority of students come from families with lower income levels. High school rugby has gained popularity in recent times and SWW has joined the trend by starting a team like many other schools in the area. Pulos would like to build an ongoing relationship with the SWW team and Alfred University. The goal of the program is to set up visits from SWW rugby students and try to get them to continue playing rugby while getting a higher education. This project would not only be beneficial for those prospective student-athletes, but also for the reputation of Alfred Rugby and Alfred University, said Pulos.

After speaking with Pulos, one can see how much he cares about being a good citizen. He believes it is very important for each member of his team to actively get involved in the community and to build good relationships with administration and faculty on both campuses, together with local businesses. Alfred Rugby has made it a team goal to be a first-class community member and a leader in club organizations.

One commonality among all players is that they believe that the friendships and bonds that they have created on the team will last a lifetime. Alumnus Mike Darr, AU class of 1994, said the friends he made among the players were the most important things he took from playing rugby. "It's Alfred Rugby players who have been there to stand up for me at my wedding, called to congratulate the birth of my child, or have

shown up to support me in the death of a loved one. The most important thing I took from playing Alfred Rugby was and is the players themselves.”

From a student’s perspective, rugby is a great option for someone who loves being an athlete and part of a team, but does not have the time to partake in such a time-consuming commitment required for NCAA-sanctioned sports programs.

Alfred Rugby senior captain Mark Harstad explains why rugby is a great option for students. “It allows students with full course schedules to belong to a contact sport team without practicing five days a week.” Harstad is a mechanical engineer from Alfred University who played football and rugby in high school and also had played football for two seasons before deciding to switch to rugby. “School work was getting harder and I felt it was time. I came back to rugby because it was such a small time commitment but I still got the good contact sport and workout, team atmosphere, and community connection.”

Harstad believes that playing rugby has taught him responsibility and integrity, as well as accountability. Players must find their own way to practice, which is not always easy without a vehicle. Each player makes it their own responsibility to show up. Rugby has taught Harstad to play with integrity as well because unlike mostly every other sport, after the game opponents stick around and hang out with each other which makes a player more respectful during the contest.

When asked how beneficial having Coach Pulos back was, Harstad responded, “Mr. Pulos is the father of Alfred rugby. He came back and set us in the right direction and has organized the team considerably from orchestrating community outreach events to running sprints and the end of practice.” Coach Pulos set the team straight on getting back into the NYS league play and shine a positive light on Alfred Rugby, he said. “His help is very much appreciated among all players.”

As for now, the rugby squad at Alfred is headed in the right direction. With a coach who has proven his worth, and a newly organized structure, the team looks to build for the future.

Responses to "After loss, Alfred Rugby takes the field again"

1. **jay kimler** Says:

Mar 27, 2010 at 3:49 PM

Great article. I played in Alfred from 96 to 00. The friends you meet will last a lifetime. Good luck on restarting the flame.

2. **Brian Juneau** Says:

Mar 28, 2010 at 2:10 PM

Great article! Having been lucky enough to be part of the original Alfred Rugby club back in 85' and 86'....little did we know at that time, during those first practices up on Jericho, that would it spawn such a legacy which Bill Pulos architected and promoted into the continued tradition that exists today. From winning upstates in the early 90's, to the multitude of alumni who still participate in men's clubs and tournaments across the US, I am extremely proud to reflect on Alfred Rugby and its continued popularity on both campuses. Go 'Fred!

3. **Cameron May '70** Says:

Apr 1, 2010 at 3:47 PM

Agreed, great article from Mr.Parke. The sort of endeavor meant to illustrate participation for its own rewards versus spectator approval. Exemplifies the best of what Alfred was, is and will be.

Participate - don't spectate...

4. **Kegs** Says:

Apr 8, 2010 at 3:37 PM

Great article. I played at Alfred from 96-97 while at Alfred State. Absolutely fell in love with it, and at the age of 34, I am still playing some. Now, I am the head coach for Coastal Carolina University Rugby Club. Last year, we went undefeated and beat Oswego State for the Nationals in DIII. Alfred Rugby helped orchestrate what I have accomplished today. I would love to see it start to thrive again and start making trips back up there for hot dog day.

5. **Lauren Grant** Says:

Apr 13, 2010 at 7:23 AM

Terrific writing. This article can be a good opening if you want to start writing a book about the team's history. I remember I used to be a fan during the period of 1997-2000, I know some of the players personally, I think the most impressive side I found about the team is that they really have an extremely strong bond amongst the players, when they got together they just like a big family instead of a sport team.

6. **James** Says:

Apr 17, 2010 at 6:41 PM

What a great story, and not just for the success of the team. The way they all work and volunteer together is wonderful, and teaches more about life than many of their classes.

7. **Alex Q** Says:

Apr 18, 2010 at 8:50 PM

I love this game, this is a great article bring back some memory.

8. **Bob Marshal** Says:

Apr 19, 2010 at 12:14 PM

Rugby is a really great team sport and it's not just for the young. Many clubs boast veteran team and I played till I was 55. Then dislocated a shoulder playing sevens. Keep playing you're never too old.

9. **Dave Moreau 90** Says:

[Apr 22, 2010 at 7:07 PM](#)

Pulos is a great coach. We would run through a brick wall for the guy if he needed us to. I am glad to hear he is back.

10. **Adam Langform** Says:

[Apr 29, 2010 at 12:55 AM](#)

Nice to see a good-time rugby story in a country where most of the "ball game" is about gridiron. I wish the team all the best :)

Adam

11. **John Marshal** Says:

[May 9, 2010 at 5:22 AM](#)

I used to play rugby back in the day but now I'm too old for it i guess, anyways all i wanted to tell you is that I enjoyed reading this article and R.I.P Dr. Jeff Hollier

12. **Paul Johnson** Says:

[May 19, 2010 at 4:12 AM](#)

A nice and informative article! I was lucky enough to be the member of the original Alfred Rugby club back in 1985. I couldn't even imagine that this will turn to such a legacy and continued tradition. Thanks.

13. **Jason Tunder** Says:

[Jun 24, 2010 at 11:36 AM](#)

I'm glad the team is back!! GO Saxons! :)

14. **Ryan Sullivan** Says:

Jun 25, 2010 at 10:45 AM

As a 2010 graduate from Alfred State and New Rugby Alum Coach Pulos has been a huge influence mentor and friend in my brief relationship. He helped me through injury and school work. Coach made time on and off the field for the team showing us the mark of a true man.

15. **Ryan Paulie** Says:

Jun 26, 2010 at 5:41 PM

I'm glad to see the Alfred Rugby club back in action. Nice to see tradition is kept.

16. **Gary Team** Says:

Jun 27, 2010 at 12:25 AM

Pulos is a wonderful coach. Nice post indeed and very informative. This will bring back those lovely memories I have with the team. Thanks

17. **cleversam** Says:

Jul 11, 2010 at 2:38 AM

Superb Photos, I played at Alfred from 98-2000, I know some of the players personally

18. **Tom "Spike" Antinora '86** Says:

Jul 11, 2010 at 12:44 PM

Great article and well deserved. Alfred Rugby is fortunate to have a man such as coach Pulos to guide them. As a member of the first Alfred team in 1985 the lessons and friendships rugby has taught me are still with me today. I admire coach Pulos and his commitment to rugby in Alfred.

19. **Gregg "Pinky" Bell** Says:

Jul 11, 2010 at 3:31 PM

Great article, it really speaks to the essences of being an Alfred Rugby player. I played from 1994 to 1999 and was involved in the Spring 1995 trip to the Bahamas to play the Freeport Men's Rugby Club and the 1996 New York State Division 2 Champs (which included a trip to Amherst, MA and a 3rd place finish in the U.S. Northeast Regional. Alfred Rugby is more than a sport, it's a fellowship that continues long after college. GO FRED!

20. **Mark Harstad** Says:

Jul 12, 2010 at 11:28 PM

Go 'Fred!

21. **Chris Beck** Says:

Jul 14, 2010 at 3:02 PM

Thank you for printing this. It's good to read about ALFRED RUGBY in the news while I'm serving over here in Afghanistan.

They are a great group of guys who rallied in a time of need. I am proud to have been part of the AU Rugby Team back in the 80s. AU Rugby will be a part of my life forever and anyone who hangs out with these guys will say the same. GO FRED!

22. **David** Says:

Jul 17, 2010 at 2:28 PM

Excellent article. It takes me back a few years. Thanks!

23. **Richard "Big Rich" Moore** Says:

Jul 18, 2010 at 11:48 PM

I agree with everybody... great article, and as "Pinky" has stated..."it really speaks to the essences of being an Alfred Rugby player." My years playing for Alfred Rugby were from 1991 to 1995. I owe a great amount of thanks to veteran players such as Darr, Keon; Berry, Big Jay, and Goose for making sure that I kept the passion for the sport that they had. Alfred Rugby, as a whole, is way more than a sport. Alfred Rugby is an

experience and brotherhood that will last a lifetime.

GO FRED!

24. **Scott Hollander** Says:

Jul 19, 2010 at 9:28 AM

What a great read. I was proud to play for Alfred from 1986-1988. I can honestly say that playing Rugby was one of the highlights of my "Alfred Experience". I am also profoundly happy that under the leadership of Coach Pulos the flame which was almost extinguished has been rekindled. The team needs the support of Alumni and I would encourage people to contribute in any way that they can.

25. **Coach** Says:

Jul 26, 2010 at 6:06 PM

Click on this link for ALFRED RUGBY CLUB:

<http://home.rr.com/willampulos>

Thanks for all the support. It's good to be back.

Coach Bill Pulos

26. **Fight Chronicles** Says:

Aug 3, 2010 at 10:43 PM

Great article about Alfred Rugby. I hope the current team can bring the club back to the level of activity and incorporate a similar number of players as that of the teams in the '80s, the good, old "Glory Days".

27. **Sean Vox** Says:

Aug 16, 2010 at 1:14 PM I played Rugby for another University from 95-97 and let me tell you I had a lot of fun doing that. The time commitment that was required made it so we could still focus on school since we were not sanctioned by the university. The only

problem was that since we weren't sanctioned by the university we had to actually spend time in classes...lol

Congrats to all the Rugby players who can balance the rugging life and school!

28. **short sales** Says:

Aug 16, 2010 at 3:54 PM

I agree Pulos is a great coach. I miss playing rugby and if it wasn't for my bum leg would be out there :)

29. **dan** Says:

Aug 18, 2010 at 3:17 AM

I've always liked Pulos. He was great when i played for him.