

Buffalo Rugby Club Competes in Playoffs

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On Saturday the Buffalo Rugby Club's (BRC) Division 2 and Division 3 teams competed in the Empire Geographic Union (EGU) playoffs. The 71-member club fields two full squads, both of which compete in the Upstate division of the Empire GU Rugby league. Buffalo Rugby Club is the only club in the Empire GU league that has both a Division 2 and Division 3 side to get both teams into this spring's playoff.

The third seeded Division 2 side hosted the 6-seeded Village Lions Rugby Football Club hailing from New York City. A tightly contested match resulted in an overtime loss for Buffalo, 31-29. Mackenzie Doolittle scored two tries for Buffalo, and Christian Feickert and Colton Kells each added another. Kyle Johannssen added three conversion scores as well as a penalty kick.

"It was a really tough match to lose" said BRC head coach Lex Maccubbin. "We outplayed that team for three quarters of the game and had a few let downs. We played well, but we didn't play a full 80 [minutes]."

At half time of the contest, Buffalo led 14-7. Kells scored and Johannssen added the conversion points to extend the lead to 21-7 in the second half. However, the Lions were able to even the score at 24-24 on the final possession of the match as the clock expired to send the contest into extra time. In the first of two 10-minute overtime periods, the Lions scored to take a 31-24 lead. Doolittle scored the late try off a set-up pass by Mike Lang however the tying conversion points were missed.

The Lions were able to recover the ball and subsequently run out the remaining time to secure the victory in Delaware Park.

Maccubbin added "We played really well, but it was disappointing that we kind of let it get away from us. However, full credit to the Village Lions for changing their game plan in the second half. It was a great game, and one of the better games we've played in the last two years."

The Division 3 side traveled to Henrietta to take on the 3-seed Rochester Colonials. The result was a hard fought 42-30 victory for the 6-seeded Buffalo club. Keith Stoerr and Cory Ratka scored two tries each for Buffalo while Rick Weiss and Alfredo Furmanek added one more each. Stoerr also connected on three conversion attempts and two penalty kicks.

After an outstanding first 40 minutes of rugby, Buffalo took a 25-5 lead into half time. However, Rochester stormed to three tries in the first ten minutes of the second half to close the gap to 25-22. Two tries and a conversion by Stoerr and one from Weiss extended the Buffalo lead to 42-22 with less than 20 minutes left in the match. The fight from the Colonials continued to be fierce as they were able to bring the score to within eight points with little time remaining.

"I was pretty confident we could beat Rochester even though they were undefeated" said Maccubbin on the Buffalo win. "You've got to play 80 minutes, and we let them back into the game. But, we buckled down and reasserted ourselves and won comfortably."

Buffalo was able to safely control the ball and ultimately the clock as they would hang on to win 42-30.

The team will travel to Danbury, CT on Saturday, April 21st to take on Danbury Rugby Football Club in the EGU D3 semifinal.

An 'alumni' match was held between the Buffalo Rugby Club 'Old Boys' and the Village Lions Alumni Gang before the start of the Division 2 match. The result was a 33-0 victory for the Old Boys. Bill Conrad led all scorers with two tries. Adam Meehan, John Turner, and Steve Lanzzone all scored one try. Clancy Seymour was 4 for 4 in conversion kicks good for eight points.

The BRC rebounded in the fall 2017 season after a fall 2016 season in which the D2 side struggled while the D3 side made it to the EGU final. In between seasons, a handful of longtime players decided to step away from the club and a fresh crop of players coming out of high school and college emerged.

The Division 2 side went 7-1 in the fall 2017 season accumulating 348 total points throughout those matches on the way to winning the Upstate D2 conference title. The squad earned the third seed as an automatic qualifier into the Empire GU D2 playoffs.

"We played some great rugby in the fall" said Maccubbin on the 2017 campaign. "We won a couple of games we might not have won the year before. We brought in some new guys – on both D2 and D3 – that helped us get into the playoffs."

The Division 3 side also posted a record of 7-1 and scored 459 total team points while only allowing 52 all season. Despite the record and conference-leading points differential, Buffalo took second in the Upstate D3 conference to the Colonials who posted an 8-0 fall record. The clubs did not meet during the fall season. The side earned a wild card berth into the playoffs as the top 2nd place team amongst the other runner-up teams in the five EGU conferences.

Coach Maccubbin stated "I think we've really turned a corner and started to rebuild and reload the pipeline. I look forward to the fall of 2018 and winning our division for both D2 and D3 and getting two teams to the spring 2019 playoffs again."

Maccubbin has been a member of the BRC since 1983 and has been the club's head coach since 2016.

Statistically, Warren Solomon (Niagara U) recorded three tries, twenty-two conversions, and seven penalty kicks to lead the club with 80 points in the fall season. Cory Ratka (Kenmore H.S. rugby) lead the club with nine tries and was second overall in scoring with 45 points. Matt Thompson (SUNY Brockport), Rob Vinal (Buffalo State), and Aaron Wright (Buffalo State) all recorded seven tries in the fall for BRC.

The club's 71 active members hail from many different backgrounds with players as young as 19 to 40 years of age.

"We have a wide array of careers within our club" said club president Jeff Qualey, a twelve-year member of Buffalo Rugby Club. "We have lawyers, engineers, teachers, business owners... anything and everything. If somebody moves into this area and they are a rugby player and looking for a job and somebody knows him, we try to take him in and help him out as much as we can." Qualey, a high school football player and wrestler and Niagara County C.C. wrestler, is a district manager for a commercial cleaning company.

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In regard to the club's membership, Qualey added "We have a lot of active alumni participation. We have original club members who started the club in 1966 and alumni from the 60s to the 2000s that serve on our board of directors." The board of directors has twelve members. A seven-person executive committee operates the club in conjunction with the board of directors as well.

Rugby alumni from University at Buffalo, St. Bonaventure, Niagara University, Buffalo State, and Canisius College make up the large majority of the club's membership which is the largest of the area's four USA Rugby member clubs.

In addition to playing high level 15s rugby in the fall and spring, Buffalo Rugby Club remains busy throughout the year.

In the late spring BRC has plans for friendlies with Canadian competition. July 27-29 BRC will head to Saranac Lake for the 45th annual Can-Am Tournament, attended by over 100 teams in different levels of competition. In August, the club will begin training to kick off the fall 2018