

# Rugby, More Than a Game, Is Tradition With Old Boys

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**THE ICE** in Memorial Auditorium Saturday afternoon naturally was cold, very cold, during the Sabres-Penguins playoff confrontation.

Over in War Memorial Stadium, the field was soggy, muddy and unplayable, postponing the Bisons' Eastern League inaugural.

Then what about a field that was cold AND muddy?

Some athletes might shy away from conditions like that, preferring to sit home with hot tea and television, or to bounce around the confines of the nearest YMCA.

But not the Old Boys.

**THE OLD BOYS**, or officially the Buffalo Old Boys Rugby Club, ran, passed and stomped around Delaware Park Saturday afternoon, worrying about their Ontario foe, and not the periodic chill that swept the field, or the mud on their shoes, legs, arms, faces and noses.

Then again, the Old Boys aren't ones to fret about such trivialities. Game conditions and the final score count for something, but must fall behind F-U-N in the rugby scheme of priorities.

"A lot of the guys on the team couldn't tell you the team's record from last year. It is important to win and the guys want to win but there is more to rugby than that," said club President Tom Finn.

**CAMARADERIE**, exercise and post-game partying are those things.

"Rugby is one of the only contact sports available to

many people after they get out of school," explained Old Boys member Ron Astrich, a Buffalo teacher. "It is a contact sport, but people aren't out to kill one another. The spirit of the game is not contact, but camaraderie.

"I love to get outside, and rugby keeps you fit. And everybody plays it for the sake of playing a sport, not for stardom. There is no money involved in playing, it's all amateur, and that is something else that makes rugby unique," said Astrich.

Post-game parties add to the revelry. After each game, the players on both sides and their mates retire to a local establishment for some drinking, dancing, singing, drinking and drinking. Oftentimes, the true winner of the day is the team that sings the loudest and drinks the most, and not who scored more points in the game.

**SUCH PARTYING** is not something that one club may do and others not. It is a tradition in rugby. It is as much a part of the sport as the infield fly rule and rosin bag in baseball.

So when the Old Boys and Ontario slipped off to the Buffalo Soccer Club in Cheektowaga after the competition, they were just doing what comes naturally. They were just following tradition in a tradition-conscious sport.

The partying tradition may be the easiest aspect of the game for casual observers to understand. The rules of rugby do confuse first-time observers, oftentimes because of the

constant action that doesn't allow much time to assimilate each play.

**RUGBY IS PLAYED** with 15 on a team, eight on the forward line and seven in back. The game is 80 minutes long, with the half lasting a grand total of five minutes. Scoring is similar to football, with points being awarded for crossing the goal line, kicking a conversion and a penalty kick. A try (touchdown) is worth four points, a kick over the goal post two points and a penalty kick three.

Teams advance the ball by kicking it forward or by passing it backwards and running with it.

That's rugby in brief. There is much more to the game, but much of it doesn't translate into print. It is some of these rules that confuse the first-time viewer — or player.

"I didn't know the game that well when I started," said member John Delaney. "Offsides, kicking the ball, throwing it back when you are tackled. It is discouraging at first for those who don't know the game, but it is easy once you get into it."

**AND THE OLD BOYS** "are into it."

The club has 50 members, divided into three teams — A (best), B and C. They play both fall and spring schedules, with about 10 games in each session. Home games have been played at Delaware Park in the past, but the club is hoping to merge with the Buffalo Soccer Club in the near future and play games on their field.

The ruggers follow another

tradition of practicing on Tuesday and Thursday nights and playing games on Saturday.

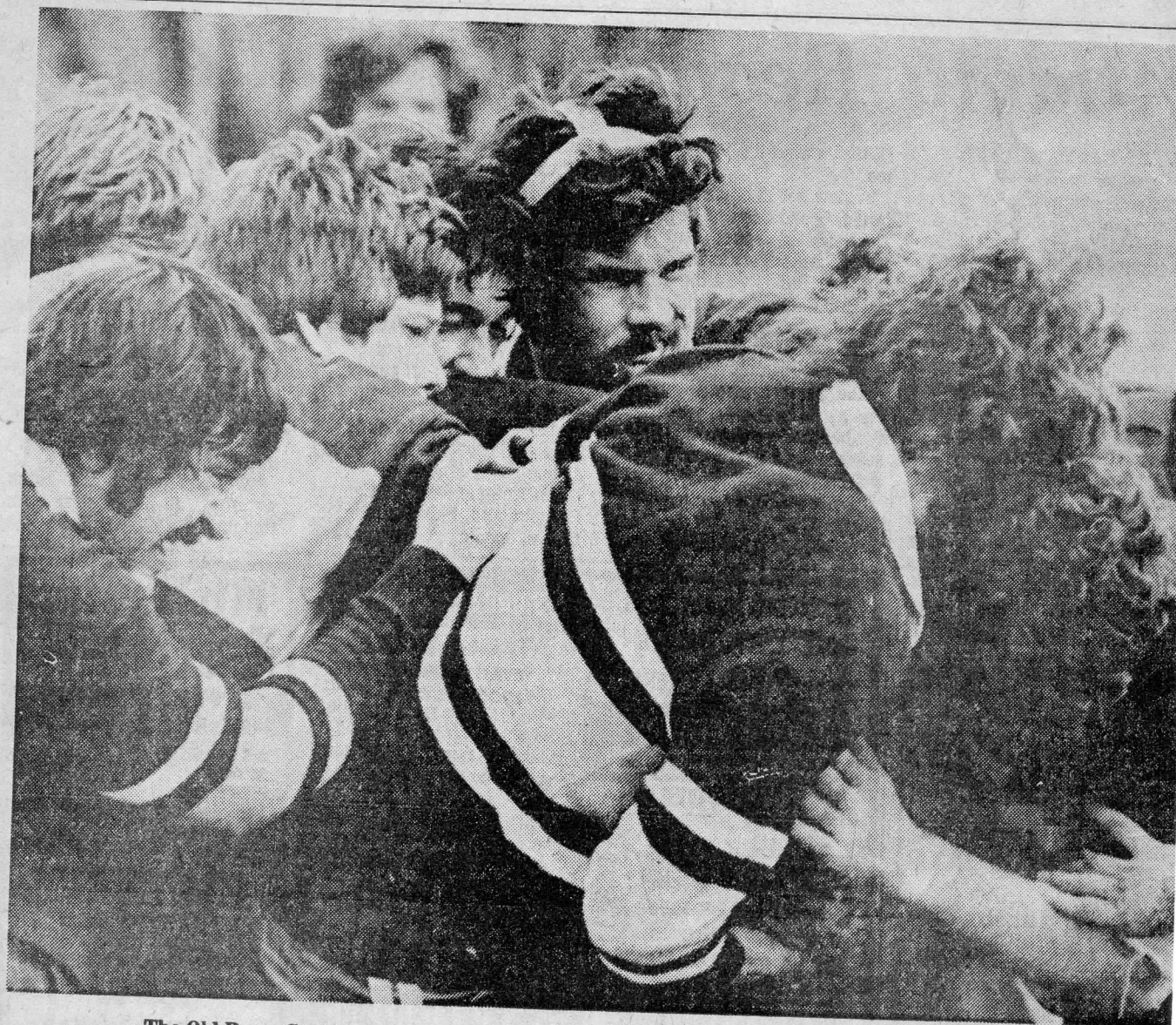
The ages of members vary from 20 to 39, with doctors, teachers, students and laborers dotting the roster. Most of the members participated in athletics in college or high school, with some achieving notoriety, among them former football All-Catholics Steve Creahan and Tom Surwell of Canisius High School and super wrestler Ed Lawrence of the University of Buffalo.

Travel and international competition are an attraction for club members. Besides weekend trips to Ontario, Rochester, Syracuse and other places, the team has made trips abroad — to England and Wales in 1975 and Ireland in 1978. In addition, the Old Boys hosted a touring Irish club in the fall of 1978.

**SO THE HARD** work and toil does produce some glorious moments. But one thing is often in the backs of players' minds. Injury. Rugby is a contact sport and the use of pads is forbidden. The player with the ball is the object of the opponent's wrath, and that wrath is bestowed in the form of hard tackling.

But contact does not always mean injury.

"Rugby is a rough game, but it is a clean game," said member Phil Wingenbach, a city fireman. "There are no cheap shots in the game and very few fights. You don't see 220-pound men with equipment hurling their bodies at each other."



The Old Boys, Canadian foes get into a scrum during a "traditional" rugby game on Saturday

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