

Elite players step up the off-season training

Rugby players aspiring to elite athleticism need only seek out Tyler Leggatt.

As the lead director of Upright Rugby, he has spearheaded a unique off-season training program that is unprecedented in North America, held in the Burlington/Oakville area.

The program is aimed at all age groups and skill levels — its pinnacle being the Elite Athlete Development Program (EADP), or as it's fondly referred to, the Academy.

It started the summer of 2007 when Leggatt rallied some of his teammates and coaching colleagues to staff a skills camp for kids. A true rugby lifer, Leggatt's experience includes playing at the national level, with the Oakville Crusaders, coaching Ontario U15, running the McMaster varsity program as assistant coach, and coaching at Abbey Park High School.

He wanted to bring the opportunities the sport had given him to a new generation of players.

"Rugby is a way of life... that has provided me with innumerable opportunities to compete, to travel, to meet people and to share this appreciation with others," he says. "Fundamentally, I want to instil a sense of success and enjoyment in the game that hopefully, will provide them with the same enduring passion for rugby that I have."

After persevering through a slow start — the initial summer program had only 12 participants — Leggatt shifted his focus to training elite athletes. "I wasn't getting those 16, 17, 18-year-old elite athletes," he says. "I'd get two or three kids, but they'd be busy — they'd have camp, jobs, cottages."

The idea of the Academy dawned on him when a parent mentioned the off-season training hockey players endure — weight room workouts, technique and skill building. He was pointed in the direction of the Athlete Training Centre, located in Mississauga. After meeting owner Rich Clarke, the idea of an elite rugby program was realized.

"Rich had primarily trained hockey players and was looking for a summer sport to carry him through the winter," he says. "I got the kids together who I thought would be keen, pitched the idea, and they were all over it."

The program runs two phases, the first starting in the fall when athletes are coming out of playing, rehabbing injuries and looking to work on core skills. Meeting twice a week, Leggatt drills them on passing fundamentals and runs them through non-contact games



Photo: Courtesy of Tyler Leggatt

Participants of the Elite Athlete Development Program.

before heading with the group to the ATC for a 90-minute workout.

"I love analysing the techniques of passing, giving them feedback and adjustments and watching them improve," he says. "You can make an impact with some kids in just a moment. Others take more work, and I like that challenge."

Once at the ATC, the athletes focus on a weight lifting and conditioning regimen. "We get them used to lifting because they function better as athletes when they are fundamentally strong,

with an increased range of movement," he says.

The athletes gain, on average, 10 to 15 pounds of muscle during their first three months. "Weights don't lie," Leggatt says. "Lots of kids can lift a 20 pound dumbbell, but once they lift it over their head, they're shaking."

Two of the Academy's graduates have already been accepted to Canada's U17 men's team, at the age of 15, and all participants are working toward playing at the provincial or post-secondary level.

Leggatt also pits his Academy athletes against the participants of Upright's indoor rugby league, a recreational winter program that offers all age group divisions and has about 700 members, drawing many from surrounding club and school programs.

"I want the players that I work with to become better, more skilled, more adept, more learned rugby players," says Leggatt. "But also want them to have fun in their pursuits so that maybe one day, they will be 70 looking back at 17 and loving what they still do, playing rugby."

— Penelope Graham

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HOSTED BY TORONTO NOMADS

Coaching clinic encourages flowing rugby

Anyone familiar with international rugby knows the French bring their own unique, adaptive, unpredictable style to the game.

With that in mind — who better to have at a coaching clinic on the modern game than one of the original forward-thinkers of rugby, former French international Pierre Villepreux.

Villepreux was one of six clinicians gathered at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston for the third annual RMC rugby coaching conference from February 12 to 14.

More than 200 coaches from across North America attended the clinic which was dubbed “moving the game forward” by organizers Frank Halligan and Sean McDonough of RMC.

For this year’s clinic, the organizers brought in international rugby specialists Villepreux (France), Gary Henderson (England), Lynn Evans (Wales), Peter Baggetta (USA), John MacMillan (Canada) and Guillermo Gulli (Argentina).

By doing so, they hoped to provide coaches in attendance with the necessary knowledge to develop ways of teaching the modern, moving game.

“By having Pierre and Lynn and their notion of the forward moving game and the power of the players’ ability to make decisions...the coaches started seeing coherent patterns in what we’re offering and they started seeing things they could implement that would be positive for Canadian rugby.”

McDonough, who came up with the concept of the rugby-specific clinic four years ago after presenting at a multi-sport clinic, says the

clinic was a success and will hopefully further the development of the game in Canada.

“Our goal is to produce better rugby in Ontario and Canada overall...to move into a more fluid game.”

The clinicians focused on various aspects of the game and how to coach it including video analysis, scrimmaging, defence and, of course, adaptive rugby, or thinking on your feet.

“They all had kind of the same philosophy,” says McDonough. “There were very few drills...They showed North American coaches a style of coaching that required very little equipment and revolved around the moving game.”

Villepreux is one of the key proponents of the moving game, not only executing it as a fullback and fly half in the 1970s but also as a coach in the 1990s and currently as a member of the IRB Laws Committee.

The 66-year-old says his rugby philosophy developed out of learning the game in his home country, where thinking on your feet is encouraged.

“It’s a French way of teaching rugby at every level...Using the game itself. In France, we play team against team and we create the situation we want, to have (players) make a decision.”

Villepreux’s focus at the coaching clinic was on players’ independence and ways to train them to think for themselves and adapt, as opposed to sticking to a game plan, regardless of what is happening on the field.

“The coach is not there to tell the player what to do, but to find the context where the player will discover how to play the game... [players] are trained in the reality of the game.”

With the success of this year’s event, RMC’s McDonough hopes to be able to begin building a group of high school coaches perpetuating the modern style of the game.

Three years down the line, the goal would be to have 40 to 50 high school coaches teaching the flowing game.”

— Tom Kennedy



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Community Announcement

Ontario Blues open trial

The Ontario Blues will be hosting the open trial/combine on Saturday, February 27 at Varsity Stadium in Toronto from 7am to 9am. This trial is for interested/eligible senior men in Ontario.

The agenda will include fitness testing, skills sessions and mini games. Players must have been registered with Rugby Ontario in 2009 or pre-registered for 2010.

There is a \$20 registration fee for all participants and please bring water, tape, footwear (no metal cleats) and a kit for contact. You will also need to bring one light and one dark coloured rugby jersey.

If interested in attending, contact arcbluesmgr@gmail.com with your name, position and club.

This announcement was provided by Mark Winokur of the Ontario Blues. To have your community announcement appear in the e-newsletter or the print edition of Scrum magazine, please e-mail events@scrummag.com.