

## TDSSAA Sevens Continue to Grow



Photo: Courtesy of Daniel Kunanec

In just five years, the Rugby Sevens has experienced a growth in popularity in the Toronto area.

While the Toronto District Secondary Schools Athletic Association (TDSSAA) runs 15-a-side rugby in the spring, it is the sevens tournament schedule in the fall that Daniel Kunanec is excited about.

Kunanec is coach of Don Mills Collegiate's rugby team and head coordinator of the TDSSAA Rugby 7s Championship series and says the city-wide tournament has grown massively since it started five years ago.

In its first year, it featured just five schools, 12 teams and three divisions over one day, but in this year it consisted of 34 schools, 59 teams and five divisions over six days and Kunanec is confident this will help foster support for the sport.

"We want to gain full support from the school board ... I can't say that we could have a much better case than we have. The growth we've experienced is great."

Currently, sevens rugby is classed as an "approved sport" by the TDSSAA, but a fully sanctioned classification would mean increased recognition and funding for the program.

"We've shown dramatic growth in our numbers of teams and

numbers of division," adds Kunanec.

Formerly a coach in the Rugby Ontario youth system, Kunanec now hopes to build up sevens in the Toronto area and believes much of the success can be attributed to the exciting nature of the rugby spin-off.

"The essential nature of the game is to just have a go....Teams expect to get scored on and to score, so it's really exciting and fun. It's just a joy."

The 2009 tournament featured a boys'bantam, junior and senior division as well as girls' junior and senior and was held at numerous fields between October 14 to 29 with pool play and finals.

Kunanec says the competition continues to grow, not only in size but also in spirit.

"The kids love it, from an athletes point of view it's just so fun to play and to hang around the tournament....The camaraderie is just unbelievable, it's a great tournament atmosphere."

With the continued success of the tournament-based rugby sevens competition amongst Toronto high schools and the recent addition of the sport to the summer Olympics, Kunanec is confident it will gain the necessary support from the TDSSAA.

- Tom Kennedy



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## Rugby Canada's Support Rugby Program

After just two months on the web, Rugby Canada's "Support Rugby" program is just over the half way to its goal of 5,000 messages.

The website, [www.supportrugby.ca](http://www.supportrugby.ca), encourages fans to take action by sending one of 44 national player e-cards to Gary Lunn, the minister of state for sport.

"Supportrugby.ca is part of our strategy to promote awareness for our carded athletes, and the significance of the funding that they receive through the Athlete Assistance Program through the federal government," said Nick Taylor, spokesperson for Rugby Canada.

The campaign was launched in late September, just two weeks before the International Olympic Committee announced the introduction of seven-a-side rugby in the 2016 summer games. In the wake of this decision, Sport Canada is reassessing the funding allocated to rugby.

Currently, Canada's 44 national male and female players receive between \$900-1,500 per month.

The supplement, known as the Athlete Assistance Program, is given to carded Canadian athletes when they are training or competing on the world stage.

Fans that log on to the site are able to send a carded player's bio to Minister Lunn; a message that is forwarded to the prime minister, minister of finance and the minister of heritage.

One section of the email reads, "I understand that Sport Canada will be reassessing rugby's allocation of cards as a result of the Olympic announcement. Given the substantial growth of rugby in Canada and the exciting opportunity presented by the Olympics, please allow this carding program to grow. Our athletes deserve nothing less."

Although the campaign is half way to its goal, Taylor is still encouraging the rugby community – and their friends and families – to email Minister Lunn.

"There has never been a greater opportunity to show a decision-maker, who has influence over our sport, that you care," he said.

- Rachael Raven

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