

Rugby Athletic Helps Build U.S. Rugby With Championship Partnerships

by Kurt Woock

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

In December, *Rugby Athletic* entered into a new, three-year partnership with the *Glendale Raptors*. The partnership pairs a major rugby apparel and equipment company with a national footprint with one of the nation's top rugby teams, which is also garnering attention from across the country. The deal is not only evidence of rugby's continued growth in popularity in the U.S., but also a demonstration of the continued evolution of the business model for rugby clubs and companies in the U.S. Both *Rugby Athletic* and the *Glendale Raptors* are engines of innovation in their respective industries, and help lead others forward in critical areas, such as communication, branding, and community engagement.

Rugby Athletic opened its doors for business in 2005. But for the team, including Chris Babiash, it wasn't the beginning. Instead, the formation of *Rugby Athletic* was the result of the volume of rugby business at the apparel and design company, *M.A. Apparel & Promotions, Inc.* The Minnesota-based company decided to create a new company focused solely on rugby. The decision to create a workforce who could immerse themselves fully in working with rugby organizations throughout the country was emblematic of *Rugby Athletic's* secret sauce: a dedication to thoroughness and long-term thinking.

"One of the reasons we're successful is that here it's not just about the sale — it's all about a partnership," said Babiash. "If teams don't understand what we do and what we offer, if they're just looking for the cheapest price, we're probably not the one for them."

What Babiash, and *Rugby Athletic* as a whole, offers is the chance to forge a long-term partnership. The design expertise, top-flight equipment lines and business experience that *Rugby Athletic* provides make it more than a merchandise supplier or apparel vendor. When operating in a relatively new industry such as U.S. rugby, a field ripe with growth and change and all the associated challenges, opting to partner with a company like *Rugby Athletic* is a strategic decision.

The challenges that come with working with relatively small rugby clubs double as a source of inspiration for Babiash, whose passion for rugby includes time spent as a player, administrator and coach. Years ago as a club president, he helped transform the mindset of his team, from one that approached budgeting and planning as a short-term hassle — raising just enough money to keep operating year-to-year — to one that instilled a longer-term, business-oriented mindset. Now, he's helping other organizations do the same thing with help from *Rugby Athletic*.

Because many clubs in the U.S. have been founded as passion projects by dedicated amateurs, a business approach has not always been central to the model under which they operate. However, Babiash points out that clubs of any size can benefit when they prioritize growth. It could lead to more money for better jerseys and newer balls. It could mean opportunities to travel and play teams farther away. Or, when done successfully over a long period of time, teams can aspire to follow the trajectory of the *Glendale Raptors*, who have their own stadium, live-streaming, and other features found in athletics at the professional level.

When a company like *Rugby Athletic* brings its branding and design expertise to the table, it helps jumpstart the business-mindset of clubs.

"Most rugby teams don't have the money to do the marketing and branding needed to legitimize the sport. So, we'll design team logos, we'll do your graphics, your letterhead, your warehouse fulfillment. We'll help you operate as a small business instead of a rugby club at no charge," Babiash explained. "We want to become a long-term partner."

Having a professional visual presence can help organizations gain legitimacy. Even something as simple as official letterheads can make a big difference when

Photo by Travis Prior
The Glendale Raptors hoisted the 2015 Pacific Rugby Premiership trophy and look to repeat in 2016 donning gear from *Rugby Athletic*.



sending out letters to potential sponsors or when sending out newsletters to fans.

Rugby Athletic's latest partnership, with the *Glendale Raptors*, joins two premier organizations.

"They're the most professionally-run club in the U.S., hands down," Babiash said. He lists the *Raptors* history of communicating effectively with its various stakeholders — fans, the community, sponsors, and even people far beyond Colorado — as its greatest strength. "The amount of exposure that they're delivering gives them so much legitimacy," he said, referring to the newsletters, active social media presence, and live-streaming of all games. "You see more and more clubs that are starting to figure out real quickly, that the more you communicate, the more exposure you have for your program, and the more exposure you have, the more sponsors you pick up."

During the next three years, *Rugby Athletic* will provide top-of-the-line *BLK* equipment to the *Raptors* to wear on and off the field. Babiash said that being able to wear equipment from one supplier, instead of piecemealing it together, will give consistency to the *Raptors* look. This, in turn, will give the team a look on par with professional teams. Babiash said they hope to invest in the fans, too, by attending games, taking part in the game day experience and demonstrating and giving away their products.

The national presence the *Raptors* are building will be bolstered with the addition of *Rugby Athletic's* vast network of rugby fans and supporters. This will lay the foundation for a relationship that will be exciting to watch as both organizations contin-

ue to grow.

"You're taking a rugby organization that 'gets it' from a grassroots level, taking a company that also 'gets it' from a grassroots level, and then putting them together. We're excited to get started."

Your Drone Headquarters!

We Are Colorado's Largest Selection Of Plastic Model Airplanes, Cars, And Military Kits

Open M-F 9:30 am-7:30 pm
Saturday 10 am-6 pm
Sunday 11 am-5 pm
www.colpar.com

\$7 OFF
Any Purchase Over \$30
With This Coupon Only.
Some Restrictions Apply.
GCCC • Expires 1/31/16

\$20 OFF
Any Purchase Over \$100
With This Coupon Only.
Some Restrictions Apply.
GCCC • Expires 1/31/16

1915 S. Havana • Aurora 80014
303-341-0414
3355 S. Wadsworth Blvd. • Lakewood 80227
303-988-5157

COLPAR'S HobbyTownUSA

THE #1 TRANSMISSION SHOP THE COMPETITION DOES NOT WANT YOU TO CALL!

TRANSMISSION PERFORMANCE MAINTENANCE SPECIAL
FREE TRASCHECK
\$69⁹⁵ Road Test, Adjust Bands, Linkage & Computer Scan & much more.
Includes changing fluid, gaskets, & filter if necessary
EXPIRES 1/31/16
Not valid with any other offer. Must present coupon with incoming order.

FREE CLUTCH ADJUSTMENT on Standards
Bring in your car If all it needs is an adjustment we'll do it at NO CHARGE
Valid with other offers Limit One
EXPIRES 1/31/16
Not valid with any other offer. Must present coupon with incoming order.

\$155 OFF Any Internal Transmission Repair
EXPIRES 1/31/16
Not valid with any other offer. Must present coupon with incoming order.

Caring & Understanding
Honesty & Performance You Can Depend On!
303-462-2626
187 W. Alameda Ave. Denver, CO 80223
www.aamcodenver.com

WE'LL BEAT ANY WRITTEN ESTIMATE OR WARRANTY!
Available
36 month warranty on parts & labor

FREE TRASCHECK includes:

- ✓ CHECK FLUID (level and condition of transmission fluid)
- ✓ ROAD TEST (road tested to check shift points and performance)
- ✓ CHECK SYSTEMS (visual inspection of transmission external controls)
- ✓ COMPUTER SCAN (scan computer system for any trouble codes)
- ✓ SERVICE RECOMMENDATIONS (we will complete our free transcheck prior to making service recommendations)

FREE TOW WITH SERVICE
Most credit cards accepted

THE #1 TRANSMISSION SHOP THE COMPETITION DOES NOT WANT YOU TO CALL!