

# Rugby Grows Through Glendale Raptors Academy Reach

by Kurt Woock

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

While winter means skiing for many Coloradoans, for the the *Glendale Raptors Rugby Academy* (GRRRA) it means more rugby, just like spring, summer, and autumn. The first months of 2016 have been filled with teaching and learning across the Denver metro area.

Jenna Anderson is the youth rugby coordinator for the Raptors. When talking with her, her enthusiasm about the benefits rugby holds for positive youth development is unmistakable. One quick glance at her calendar, and one quickly sees the extent of her dedication to sharing all the programming the Glendale Raptors Rugby Academy offers.

One recurring entry is the *Raptors In The School* program. Jenna, along with coaches and players from the Glendale Raptors teams, travels to schools during the day to

teach rugby basics during P.E. classes. "We see as many kids as we can fit in," she said. "So far, we've seen about 1,500 kids since the end of January." She said some students have had some exposure to rugby, including attending games at *Infinity Park*, but have not had formal instruction in the rules and proper playing techniques. To that end, students aren't the only ones learning at these events: P.E. teachers also learn about teaching rugby in their classes in order to bring one of the country's fastest growing team sports to future classes.

For the first time ever, the GRRRA also offered a more immersive school experience for students interested in learning more. Students at *University Park Elementary* were able to sign up for a six-session, after-school rugby program. Look for this opportunity to appear elsewhere in the future.

Middle school students are of particular



*Try On Rugby* gives girls in third through 12th grades the chance to learn rugby in a non-contact and positive environment from the Glendale Raptors Women's teams.



Players from the Glendale Raptors Rugby Academy get to showcase their skills at half-time of the Glendale Raptors matches at *Infinity Park*.

importance to the GRRRA mission. Learning effective and safe techniques from the ground up is easiest at that age. Anderson said that middle school is also a key time to introduce students to the value of developing skills in multiple sports. She said there is a trend of students choosing to "specialize" in a sport, often before they even reach junior high. This specialization comes at the expense of becoming a well-rounded athlete.

The issue is larger than rugby. Although it might seem logical to assume that a student who devotes 20 hours a week to a particular sport will have a leg up over another student who devotes 10 hours to two different sports, the opposite is actually more likely. Avoiding specializing too early actually increases the likelihood for success in the sport a student might eventually end up specializing in.

Students who develop skills in more than one sport don't separate the things they learn in each into silos. Instead, the mental and physical skills they pick up in one sport can be applied to all the others. Think of it as cross pollinating. A football player might become a stronger tackler after learning about tackling in the rugby tradition. A basketball player's sense of court awareness could develop more deeply after learning how rugby players see the field. The possibilities are endless.

In addition to bringing rugby to schools, the Glendale Raptors Rugby Academy has been busy holding events at *Infinity Park*. A first-of-its-kind tackling clinic took place in early April. Anderson said the clinic will become a part of GRRRA's regular programming.

Raptors coaches, including head coach Andre Snyman, were on hand to teach safe, effective tackling techniques. Two sessions in total were held, one for 8-11-year-old boys and girls and one for 12-18-year-old boys and girls. Anderson said that the clinic attracted coaches and football players in addition to rugby players.

"It doesn't matter what sports you play," she said. "Players learn the original styles of tackling with the shoulder and not your head." She said rugby tackling skills have been embraced by the *Seattle Seahawks*, among other organizations. She's also seen kickboxing, soccer, and cross country athletes benefit in various ways.

While some GRRRA programs are meant as introductory or beginner programs, Anderson is quick to point out that GRRRA offers an incredible opportunity for those looking to make their mark at the game's highest levels. Raptors head coach Andre Snyman said the ability to work with the Raptors coaches and have access to the country's premier rugby facility is a one-of-a-kind opportunity top prep students should seriously consider, and one that many have already taken advantage of. He said that beyond physical development, players will leave with a higher rugby I.Q. At GRRRA, they'll learn what it takes to take their game to the next level.

As winter turns to spring, Glendale Raptors Rugby Academy will continue to offer rugby opportunities of all kinds. April meant the beginning of *Try League*, for K-9 boys and K-8 girls. Anderson is also excited for the girls-only "try-on rugby event." It's a girls rugby clinic for those aged 8 to 18, from beginner to advanced. Participants are encouraged to bring a friend with them to play the sport together.

The programs provided by GRRRA continue to give Denver's youth a positive, encouraging environment in which to grow. Thousands have already taken advantage in 2016. And, as the year continues, more and more families will become part of the Raptors family.

Visit our website  
[www.glendalecherrycreek.com](http://www.glendalecherrycreek.com)

**GLENDALE RAPTORS RUGBY ACADEMY**

## TRY LEAGUE

**April 26 - June 25**  
**BOYS & GIRLS | K-8**

Practices at *Infinity Park* | Tues/Thurs | 5:15-6:45pm  
 Matches | Saturdays | May 21-June 25 | 9am-3pm

Contact Jenna Anderson  
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**PLAY YOUTH RUGBY**

it's not too late to register to play.

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