

Glendale Raptors Rugby Culture Thriving In New Season

by Marco Cummings

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

A new season is well underway for the Glendale Raptors men, who have begun competition in this year's Major Rugby Championship (MRC) for the spring season.

The Raptors have already come out of the gates strong, taking home a 50-19 away win from Cal Cup finalists Life West to kick off 2017, followed up by 57-12 dispatching of collegiate powerhouse BYU in their home opener at Infinity Park.

"Expectations are still high as they have always been," said Glendale Raptors head coach David Williams, who is in his debut campaign as head coach. "Glendale now has full-time players that train nine sessions per week instead of two training sessions and have created a true high performance environment for players to improve and thrive."

Glendale has also seen the injection of a handful of top quality players, including center Chad London and hooker Zach Fenoglio, who have returned from a stint with the Denver Stampede of the Professional Rugby Organization (PRO). The pair will serve as co-captains for Glendale this season.

"It is great being back with Glendale again this year," said Fenoglio. "I look forward to continuing to give everything I can to this team and to this community, whatever that may be. I am looking to continue to build the culture in the program and help bring in the next generation of Raptors."

Williams is glad to have both long-time Raptors and USA Eagles back in the fold to help the team this spring.

"They are quality players that add a lot both on and off the pitch which is crucial for the development of the team and themselves," said Williams. "Their skill execution, accuracy, speed of thought and pace they play the game shows how the game should be played to the players around them. There is some great competition for places and having better quality players



Glendale Raptors center Ata Malifa steps and carries the ball through the BYU defense with fellow center Chad London in support on match day at Infinity Park.

Photo by Justin Purdy

pushes every player at each training session to improve."

Also joining the squad is fly-half Ata Malifa, twin brother of former Glendale Raptor Nese Malifa.

"It's been good being back with Glendale," Ata Malifa said. "I guess it's a no brainer deciding to play for the Raptors; as a rugby player you always want to play at a high level and that's what Glendale is about and no doubt a club that speaks volumes considering its success the last several years."

The players have quickly adapted to having Williams as their new head coach, who has himself spent years with Glendale as a strength and conditioning coach as well as an assistant with the Stampede.

Said Fenoglio, "Coach Williams is a play-

er's coach through and through. He is up front and honest in his expectations and in his analysis which is great for us. He has a simple plan, high expectations for us and he gives us the tools to achieve those expectations. He gives a lot of trust in the players to perform and he is a guy we all love playing for."

Williams himself explains that it's been a smooth and easy transition to work with the players, many of whom he's known for a long time.

"I have known the majority of the players for a few years, so they know what I am about and what I stand for and those players that are new get my style very quickly," explained the Raptors coach. "I want each and every player to reach their potential, and that is represented within the train-

ing sessions that challenge the players to improve, ask questions and find solutions. I have a clear-cut aim for the team and how to achieve that aim, but the players have to be willing to put the work in to build their processes to achieve the outcome."

Glendale was able to navigate its opening games well. But the team will also be entering some uncharted territory with some of the teams they'll be facing in the MRC, a docket of opponents including the Austin Huns, New Orleans (NOLA) and Rugby Utah.

"Obviously, we take every opponent seriously no matter who it is but there have been some teams who have bulked up their sides with some good talent from all over like the Austin Huns," said Malifa. "New Orleans seem to be the dark horses as a team we're not as familiar with, but they could become a force to be reckoned with."

Coach Williams was likewise impressed with the resume the Huns have built up this season.

"Austin Huns will be a great challenge as they also have full time players, as well as when we go north of the border and play against the Toronto provincial team and ARP Mystic River from Boston," said Williams. "Each and every game is an exciting challenge for the team and we are always looking to improve and gel as a team."

Despite two 50-point offensive performances to start off the season, overall improvement continues to be the Raptors' mindset as they continue their season.

"We are a long way off to where I think we can ultimately get to and are constantly working on improving as individuals, unit and the whole team performance," Williams said. "When we stick to our shape, pattern, winning the physicality and play with some flare, we go very well. If we cut down on our mistakes and stick to the basics of catch, pass, physicality, width, launch, hit and stick on defense, we will be a much better team."



Billy the Bud




Blaze

LOCAL'S DISCOUNT



30% OFF

ON ALL MARIJUANA PRODUCTS!!

***MUST PRESENT CO ID**

HEY ALL YOU BOOTLEGGERS!

TEXT THE SPEAKEASY CODE "BAKE"

TO 720-809-7129

FOR SMOKIN HUSH-HUSH DEALS

SMOKINGUNAPOTHECARY.COM | 720-519-0891

492 S. COLORADO BLVD. GLENDALE, CO 80246, NEXT DOOR TO SHOTGUN WILLIE'S