

# Landry Returns To Rugby After NFL Pursuit

by Marco Cummings

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

The sport of Rugby shares a common DNA with American Football, dating back to the late 1800s when both sports added the aspect of carrying the ball in hand to the laws of the game, branching both sports off from their common ancestor: association football (the sport now known as soccer in the United States).

In the U.S., participants in the two sports often try their hand at both, and one need not look far outside of Glendale to find prime examples. Glendale Mayor Mike Dunafon tried his hand in the NFL with the *Denver Broncos* in the mid-1970s before becoming enamored with rugby in the British Virgin Islands. Current *Glendale Raptors* captain Zach Fenoglio played both rugby and football at *Regis Jesuit High School* in Aurora before moving on to coach both at his alma mater.

The newest addition to the Glendale Raptors' roster has been forged in a similar mold. Raptors second-row man Ben Landry joins Glendale after a year of pursuing a dream to play in the NFL. The for-

mer *Seattle Saracens* and *USA Rugby* player earned an invite to a *Seattle Seahawks* minicamp as both he and the team looked to determine whether his rugby skill set would translate to the biggest stage in American football.

Physically, it was an easy transition to make for the 6-foot-6, 270-pound Landry, who featured at tight-end in the American game.

"As far as running routes and blocking, that was just athleticism that I do every week playing rugby," Landry explained. "That wasn't a big change for me at all."

He also had the benefit of a ringing endorsement from one of the biggest names in the NFL, his longtime friend and former high school teammate, J.J. Watt of the *Houston Texans*.

"Ben is such a hard worker, and he's extremely, extremely mentally tough," Watt said in an interview with ESPN, adding, "He's a brute force kind of guy."

Work hard is what Landry did, but he faced numerous challenges along the way in pursuit of his NFL dream.

"The biggest challenge was basic football



Ben Landry is reunited with the sport he loves as he suits up for the Glendale Raptors Rugby Football Club.

I.Q.," Landry explained. "Learning the playbook and stuff like that. You watch NFL on T.V. and you really don't see how intricate all the play calling and all the audibles at the line are until you get in that situation."

In the end, his year-long journey didn't pay off with a much-coveted NFL contract. But he did reap the rewards of the intense NFL training he underwent during that period.

"I'd have to say the physicality is an interesting take," said Landry. "When I trained for the NFL I really trained for strength, speed, and acceleration. In rugby, you train for aerobic capacity and conditioning. As I'm sitting right now, I'm bigger, faster and stronger than I've ever been in my entire life and I'd have to contribute that to a year of trying to prep for the NFL."

In Glendale, Landry has been reunited with his first love and passion in sport. A rugby player since the age of seven, the Peewaukee, Wis., native was first introduced to

the game by his father and uncle, who both played for *Milwaukee Rugby Club* back home.

"For me it's always been football in the fall, basketball in the winter and rugby in the spring," he said. "Rugby is my first passion. [The NFL] was an awesome experience, but going in to that, I put a timeline on that opportunity. I said, I'm going to devote a year to this to give it an actual shot, a solid go, a good effort. If nothing accumulates, then I'm going to head back to rugby. That was always kind of my plan."

In Glendale, he's been reunited with a sport he loves but also a familiar head coach in Glendale's David Williams. The pair developed a rapport while both part of the *USA Eagles* and members of Denver's PRO Rugby team, the *Denver Stampede*, during its inaugural season last year.

"He's your head strength coach, he's your head skills coach and the head coach during trainings at night," Landry said of Williams. "So, you really work with one man and his all-encompassing idea of the entire program. One guy being able to do it all really builds a team atmosphere."

Williams has likewise welcomed Landry as an important addition to the Raptors.

"The team and I are only too happy he chose to come back to Denver," said Williams. "Lando brings a lot to the daily training environment with his training attitude and just being a top bloke that strives to be the best he can be. He has gotten straight back into rugby training and analysis, which is a testament to owning his role within the team and doing his job."

While Landry's long-term goal is to make it back into the mix in the *USA Eagles* player selection pool, his job with the Raptors maintains a singular focus: bringing a Major Rugby Championship to Glendale.

"We're finishing up this season and we have a championship game in June that we're planning on playing in, and we'd love to win."



The Glendale Sports Center held its annual Easter Eggstravaganza on April 15, 2017, at Infinity Park south field. There were nearly 200 participants to collect the 3,000 candy-filled eggs. Three lucky children found the prize-winning eggs and won themselves a goody-filled Easter basket. The Easter Bunny along with the Glendale Police Department were on hand for photos.

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