

## Glendale Raptors Rugby Academy Youth Athlete Spotlights Gemma Ryu

by John Arthur

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

Beginning in April 2016, the Glendale Raptors Youth Rugby programs will transition to the new, more comprehensive Glendale Raptors Rugby Academy. Offering a variety of formats suitable for youth interest at all participation levels, the new program will work not only to promote rugby as a challenging, enjoyable means of pursuing personal growth, but will also provide participants a pathway to becoming players at an elite level.

To highlight the transition, Coach of the Glendale Raptors High School team Robin Roberts spoke about one of the most promising young players in rugby, Gemma Ryu. A high school sophomore playing on the Raptors 7s team, Gemma is a standout not only for her on-field performance, but also for her dedication off the field, as well as her discipline as a multi-sport athlete. Coach Roberts describes Ryu as "very dedicated to learning and improving at all levels. She has a very real passion for the sport and wants to play at the highest level she can." In the fall season of 2015, Gemma led the 7s team in tackles, tries scored, and in creating turnovers.

Gemma's dedication has not escaped notice. She has been announced as part of the Girls High School All American pool for 2016. To further improve her skills, Gemma is also in the process of trying out for the Flatirons Rugby Academy Team. The elite, performance and development based squad employs rugby to build life experiences and opportunities, whether at the collegiate, national, international, or Olympic level. In the first round of tryouts Gemma was in the top three for the 20 and 40 meter runs, and scored second highest in the Yo-Yo Test, a test designed to determine the physical endurance of athletes. Though teams have yet to be announced, Coach Roberts reports she is on track to make the A-side squad. Additionally, Gemma is par-



The Glendale Raptors Girls High School team played for third-place in the sevens division of the Colorado State Championships.

Photo by Dave Tweed Photography

ticipating in a lifting program with the Glendale coach, improving her back squat and nearly doubling her personal best bench press in just four weeks of training.

Though the power of the Raptors youth programs should not be underestimated, the commitment of athletes like Ryu is beyond compare. Her rugby accomplishments are legion, but the Colorado Academy sophomore is also a member of the school's swim and track teams, as well as an aspiring triathlete. Outside of sport, she is a member of the school choir and an accomplished pianist. Originally from Chicago, Ryu's experiences with the landscapes of the Midwest and Colorado have encouraged her to attend a coastal university, though as a sophomore she admits she hasn't spent much time looking at specific schools. One thing she knows for sure — she wants to attend a college with a great 7s program. Even as a young athlete, Gemma's outlook on the hard work required to excel is decidedly mature: "One thing I've learned from playing for Glendale and

being around WPL and PRP champions is that success is never accidental. Seeing how hard all of these players work and all of the time they commit, I know if I want success for my team, I'll have to do the same."

Ryu's success as part of the Glendale Raptors program is phenomenal, but not an anomaly. Two recent graduates, Caitlin Rogers and Grace Chao, have realized considerable achievement in rugby after moving on from the program, highlighting the invaluable foundation the Glendale experience offers.

Rogers, a freshman at Colby University in Maine, is a multi-position player for the school's Division II rugby team. "In our past season, I became a starting lock, and Colby took third in the NESCRC (New England Small College Rugby Conference). At the end of the season, I was elected Vice President of the Colby Women's Rugby Football Club, and now we're practicing for our spring season, which will incorporate both 7s and 15."

Chao, a former top try scorer and captain

of the Glendale squad, attends Harvard University, where she plays alongside another former Glendale High School rugby teammate Maya Learned. Reflecting on her first season of collegiate play and her experience with Coach Roberts and the Raptors, Chao said, "I know for sure I wouldn't be the athlete I am today without Robin, and this season has helped me realize what an amazing opportunity I had with the program at Glendale."

Asked to reflect on her experience with the Raptors program, and with the accomplished athletes it has produced, Coach Robin Roberts was full of praise. "These girls all inspire me to work harder and do better to be the best coach I can for them. All I hope is that I somehow make a difference, however slight, in their lives and rugby." If the success of Gemma Ryu and the Raptors alumni that have preceded her are any indication of the proficiency of the youth rugby programs, the forthcoming Glendale Raptors Rugby Academy, and its participants, will flourish.

### Parking In A Handicap Space?

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Trump or Clinton, Cruz or Sanders, or maybe even Kasich or Rubio, research what their stance is on people who illegally park in disabled parking spots. If their platform calls for carpet-bombing those insurgents. That's the candidate who will get my vote!

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