

# Glendale Raptors Set For Rugby 7s, The Newest Olympic Sport

by Marco Cummings

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

With back-to-back Pacific Rugby Premiership (PRP) Championships now in hand for the Glendale Raptors, the focus shifts to the summer rugby season and a different version of a game which Glendale Mayor Mike Dunafon has called "the world's community sport."

Summer's arrival also marks a new season on the rugby calendar, with the focus shifting from the Rugby 15s game of the PRP to Rugby 7s. Like 3v3 basketball or soccer, or the seven-on-seven scrimmage version of American football, Rugby 7s is a fast paced, high scoring version of the game tailored to delight spectators. This year, Rugby 7s will be placed in the world spotlight, making its debut as the newest competitive sport at this year's Rio De Janeiro Summer Olympics.

The sport's presence on the global stage is an exciting prospect for rugby's growth on the local level in places like Glendale, a city which dubs itself as *RugbyTown, USA*.

"Sevens will be in the Olympics and it is also a major springtime competition on university campuses and places rugby out in front of the public," explained Glendale Director of Rugby Mark Bullock. "This can lead to curiosity in 7s and, ultimately, an interest in 15s. At the lower level, it can be used as an introduction to the game due to the fact there are less players involved on the pitch at one time. At the upper level, it is a highly skilled endeavor and if we play quality sevens it can be added to recruiting players who may also play 15s."

Growth and development will continue to be the key focus for Glendale heading into this year's 7s season. Toward the end of the Raptors' PRP campaign, the team was affected by the loss of some of its top players to the recently established *Professional Rugby Organization (PRO)* league. Play of the PRO league will continue throughout the summer, meaning Glen-



At left, Armandt Peens of the Glendale Raptors carries the ball upfield against Stars Rugby 7s during the 2015 Serevi RugbyTown Sevens.

Photos by  
Seth McConnell

At right, Glendale Raptor Devon Reed showcases the speed and athleticism required for a successful Rugby 7s player.



dale's 7s side will also be affected.

"Obviously this season, we will not have guys like Chad London, Hanco Germishuys and all of the other guys in the PRO League," Glendale Raptors head coach Andre Snyman said of the upcoming 7s campaign. "Those guys will be committed until the end of July, so it's going to be a different situation."

Snyman acknowledged the new challenges his team faces in re-establishing itself, but was likewise excited at the prospect of the player development aspect they present.

"It's going to be a different situation. We will be competitive, but it will be more of a development side than PRP level side," he continued. "We have to really focus this summer on developing players; taking them to these tournaments so they can experience the next level."

With the experience gained this summer, the Raptors head coach is not only looking for diamonds in the rough, he's looking to polish them into players that could contribute to Glendale defending its

PRP title come Spring 2017.

"It will definitely be a good tool to prepare for the PRP season in 2017," Snyman explained. "Last summer, Johnny Ryberg came out of the 7s mold. During the last couple of games in the PRP season this year, he stepped up and did really well. Hopefully this summer we can pick up one or two players for next season in the PRP. It will be an opportunity for players to showcase their skill and for me to groom them."

He'll have plenty of opportunities to do just that. The Raptors will be competing in five different 7s tournaments this summer, beginning with a trip to San Diego on June 18 at a qualifying tournament hosted by *Old Mission Beach Athletic Club (OMBAC)*.

The following weekend, Glendale will participate at the *Denver Tournament* hosted at *Dick's Sporting Goods Park* in Commerce City.

Glendale will then open July with a trip to Kansas City, Missouri, on July 9 for another qualifying tournament.

Later that month, Glendale will take its

travels north of the border, participating in the *Magnificent 7s* tournament in Canada on July 24.

The Raptors 7s season will conclude with arguably what has become the pinnacle of Rugby 7s tournaments in North America. For the fifth year, *Serevi RugbyTown Sevens* will make its return to *Infinity Park* (Aug. 26-28) with 20 teams competing (including one representing each branch of the U.S. military) over the course of 70 matches for a \$10,000 winner take all purse. In addition to the expanded format, this year's edition of SRS will also feature a college level tournament.

It's a spectacle which will be sure to delight both participants and fans once more.

"We're excited," Snyman said. "This year is going to be bigger than the previous years. It's going to be big and there are some quality teams that have committed already. We're all looking forward to it."

Rugby 7s is a game which requires players to close faster, hit harder and dig deeper; and it will all be on display in Glendale this summer.

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