

# A Peek At The Park's Power Planner: Glendale's Kieran Nelson

by John Arthur

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

Over the final weekend of August, while central Colorado basked in late summer sun, the Serevi RugbyTown 7s Tournament roared in Glendale. In its fifth year of competition, the three-day tournament featured 20 teams (including teams from all five U.S. Military Branches) playing for a \$10,000 winner-take-all purse. Rugby 7s, a quicker variation of traditional 15-a-side

Rugby Union play, features two seven-minute halves and puts the importance of a team's speed, strength, and stamina at the fore. From August 26-28, the RugbyTown 7s Tournament saw 62 matches, with the underdog Glendale Raptors clawing their way to an impressive second place finish overall.

The excitement for rugby was palpable in Glendale, with thousands of fans in attendance, but the success and growth that



Photo by Kirsten Kreiling

Rain or shine, warm or cold, Kieran Nelson is always ready to welcome rugby fans into the stadium at Infinity Park.

the Serevi RugbyTown 7s Tournament enjoyed was no accident. The organization, planning, and execution of the event are the product of the acumen of a highly skilled and dedicated staff, with Director of Facilities and Stadium Operations Kieran Nelson at the helm. Working alongside her colleague, Stadium Operations Manager Michael Hoff, Nelson has produced hundreds of local community and private events, as well as national and international rugby games and tournaments at Infinity Park.

A Colorado native, Nelson spent her college years in the Pacific Northwest, working in politics, human resources, and fundraising before transitioning into event planning at Infinity Park. Asked about what goes into planning an event like the RugbyTown 7s Tournament, Nelson shrugged, "What doesn't? We begin planning a year in advance, and everyone in the City of Glendale is involved with the production of an event like this. It's amazing the amount of effort and teamwork required. It takes a village." Responsible for virtually every logistical aspect of the tournament, Nelson's role is paramount. "This is probably the premier 7s tournament in the country. Every year we outdo ourselves and take it to a new level — we're creating new rugby fans."

This year, the RugbyTown 7s Tournament was accompanied by Glendale's Bruises and Brews Beerfest, which featured 20 breweries and attracted nearly 1,500 attendees. Beer and rugby: two Colorado staples that certainly go better together.

For an event at Infinity Park, Nelson coor-

dinates the staffing of guest services, security, and in-stadium food and beverage vendors, determines layouts, tent locations, and all necessary event rentals, while also working closely with the marketing team for promotion. Infinity Park Event Center staff coordinate the logistics for the VIP reception and post-tournament banquet, working closely with the stadium staff to ensure everything runs smoothly from beginning to end. Glendale Public Works maintains the fields, including the award-winning stadium pitch, practice fields, city parks and the Festival Plaza.

Deputy City Manager Linda Cassaday oversees the entire tournament, from initial invitations to tackling the arduous task of coordinating travel and lodging for teams, referees and staff who fly in for the tournament. City employees all dig in to assist with everything from managing incoming deliveries to set-up and filtering through all the invoices and payments that need to be made pre- and post-tournament.

As Nelson says, "This is truly a team effort." With just herself and Hoff as full-time stadium employees, an event like the Serevi RugbyTown 7s Tournament sees the number of contracted staff balloon to as many as 250. While a typical Raptors game might require 40 guest relations and security staff, with an additional 20 personnel working on webcast and audio/video production, daily staffing for the RugbyTown 7s tournament saw double those numbers — the scale and scope of Nelson's involvement is truly impressive. "It's exhausting to plan an event like this," she said, "but I thrive on it. The minute the first teams start to arrive, the first tents go up — that energy creates a buzz felt throughout the city."

Though she admits to enjoying every aspect of her work, the Director of Facilities does have a life away from Infinity Park. Much of Nelson's time outside the office is currently spent coordinating another important event — her daughter's transition to college.

She and her husband also enjoy Colorado's ever-growing craft beer scene and spending time with their pets. Asked about her career at Infinity Park, Nelson is reflective. She left a position she enjoyed with National Jewish Health to explore a contract event planning role at Infinity Park in 2009: "It was a huge risk for my family, but it fascinated me and we decided to take the leap. It was amazing from day one." Never intending to become involved in this type of work, she loves her job and is, clearly, quite good at it. Nelson also recognizes the importance of Infinity Park, "It's the key-stone of all of the things that are happening in Glendale, and I'm proud to have been on the ground since the beginning. The growth has been incredible and it will only continue."

With the continuing expansion of 7s tournament play, and rugby's popularity in the U.S. climbing quickly, Nelson's gamble on Infinity Park has clearly paid off. That payoff extends to fans and guests as well, as any attendee of the thoughtfully and expertly planned events at Glendale's crown jewel can attest.



Photo by Justin Purdy

Kieran Nelson loves to share her infectious personality and sings along with Mamma Mia during Monday Movie Madness at Infinity Park.

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