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The Texas A&M Rugby Club, shown in action above during a tournament here this summer, begins its fall schedule Saturday.

## A&M rugby set to open season

By DOUG HALL  
Sports Writer

*Ag players aren't strangers to game's pain, pleasure*

The Texas A&M Rugby Club is good. So good in fact, that last April the Aggies won their 15th straight Texas Collegiate Championship. "A&M is by far the best college team in the state," said Tim Cone, a senior rugby team player from San Antonio. "We are definitely the oldest and we've never been beaten by another college team in Texas." That first statement borders on cockiness, but that second one is just downright impressive. Especially if you consider the Aggies' 20-plus years of competition against Southwest Conference rivals Texas, SMU, Rice and Texas Tech.

A&M's domination over its SWC opponents forces them to play a more competitive fall schedule in preparation for the spring conference tournaments. That schedule consists of rugby clubs from cities throughout Texas. "We won't play any college teams until late in the spring," said Cone, whose "fly-half" position is comparable to football's quarterback. "We are way above their (other SWC

teams') level right now and it wouldn't help us out to play them in a regular match."

A regular rugby match is played with 15 men on a team or "side." Most clubs carry two or three sides, with the more experienced players on the first side, or team.

However, the A&M rugby team, voted the most outstanding club sport on campus last year, encourages anyone to come out for the squad.

Mike Livengood, a senior player from Houston, said over 20 rookies have shown interest in joining the club this season. Of those 20, only three have played rugby before.

Cone said, "We take anybody and everybody. We'll never cut anybody, unless we see that they might get hurt, and we welcome social members also."

Which calls to mind two of the more publicized aspects of the game. Pain and partying. First, the pain.

Cone said the physical wear-and-tear of rugby is intense due to its non-stop running and physical contact. Surveys have estimated rugby players run almost two miles in each of the two 40-minute halves, most of which is sprinting.

"We definitely do a lot of running," Cone said. "It's just like playing tackle football without the pads."

Cone said rugby players take a lot of pride in their "macho" ability to withstand pain and keep going.

"It takes a lot of guts to keep throwing your body in front of other people," he said. "But I'd hate to see Marshall Land (A&M's 6-foot-6, 365-pound offensive lineman) on the rugby field. I'd lose a lot of 'macho' right there."

Second, the partying.

Cone said rugby is based as much on the social aspect as the physical. "The heritage is half rugby and half social," he said. "There has probably never been a rugby game played where there hasn't been a

party afterwards. It is expected that the host team buys a couple of kegs for the visitors.

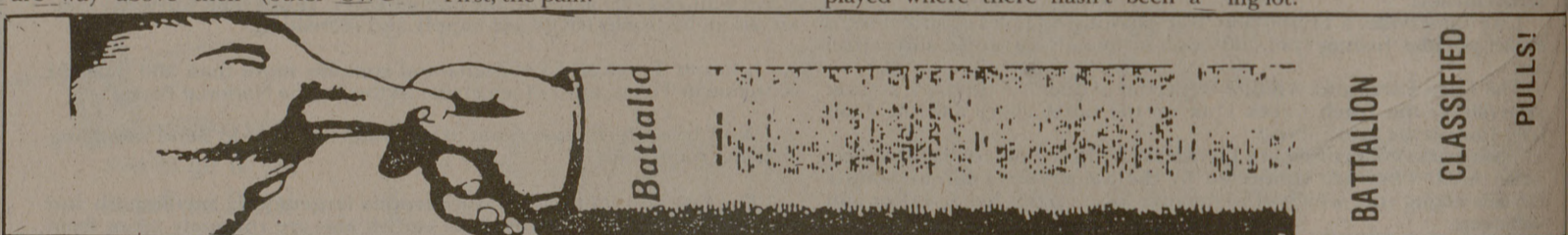
"We'd rather not be known as drunkards, but there is that social side of it which is kind of an important aspect."

Despite the team's remarkable success, Cone said fan support at A&M is somewhat disappointing. On an average weekend, only 40 or 50 fans turn out to watch an Aggie rugby game.

Cone attributes this to a lack of knowledge of the game, but adds that rugby is the most popular club sport in the country.

"Football is so big right now that we'll probably never overcome it," he said. "But it (rugby) is a lot more exciting sport. If more people knew about it, they'd probably watch less football."

The A&M Rugby Club opens its season Saturday at 1 p.m. against the Austin Rugby Club. The match will be held on the polo field behind the Zachry Engineering Building parking lot.



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