

Women's rugby team ranks 8th nationally

By MARY COX
Staff Writer

MENTION WOMEN'S RUGBY, and I bet you see some eyebrows raise. But what you think about women's rugby matters little to these women, because they're confident in who they are and what they do.

Part of that confidence comes from being ranked eighth in the nation.

"We're one of the few A&M teams ranked nationally," says Sharon Harrison, president of the women's rugby team.

Jeannie Von Stultz, the players' coach, admits that some people may think women rugby players are a bit rugged.

"It's real hard because some men think women ruggers should have fangs," Jeannie, a sophomore psychology major, says. "They always assume that rugby players aren't attractive."

"Some people expect these girls to go around crushing beer cans on their heads," Sharon, a junior biomedical science major, adds.

But Jeannie says a Playboy bunny started women's rugby on this

campus about a decade ago. And bunnies certainly don't crush beer cans on their heads or have fangs. And neither do women ruggers.

In fact, at the High Desert Rugby Classic in Albuquerque last month, Jeannie says the team got complimented on their abilities as well as their good looks.

"They (male ruggers and the referees) told us we were the prettiest team around," Jeannie says.

And by winning second place, they proved they could play well too.

"We came together as a team," Sharon says. "It was great. The rookies came along, and we felt a lot of team unity there." It's especially great that the team is close when you consider only three players returned from last year, she adds.

Sharon attributes the team's closeness in part to traveling as group to tournaments. "The team also gets together socially a lot at parties and at study sessions after practice," Sharon says.

Jeannie says the closeness also stems from a deep trust among team members.

"I trust anyone on the team," Jeannie says. "There's a strong bond

because I trust them with my life on the field."

And she's not kidding. This sport has got to be intimidating knowing that there's nothing between you and the next team except some of your teammates.

"Rugby's a full contact sport," Jeannie says. "It's skin and bones against skin and bones. But you expect hits, so it's not like football where you've got a lot of padding. You're going to hit someone a lot harder wearing all that equipment."

SURPRISINGLY ENOUGH, Jeannie and Sharon swear there are less injuries out there on the field than you might think.

"We've had more of our players hurt playing softball than rugby," Sharon says. But she'll quickly admit to lots of bruises and being 'sore all over.'

Despite the pain associated with rugby, Jeannie says it's very addicting.

"I've played all sports, but rugby is the most challenging," Jeannie says. "I'm in better shape than I've ever been."

"Rugby's great when you're in shape, because there's no substitutes. You play 40 minutes and

40 minutes, full time, with a five minute half. The only way to get off the field is if you're injured.

"You sprint, jog, sprint, and run the whole time."

And since the field is a little longer than a football field, that's covering a lot of territory. Most players stay in shape by running and lifting weights.

"I lift every night and run every other night," Sharon says.

For Sharon, rugby's more than a great way to stay in shape, it's a personal challenge and a vent for her frustration.

"All the things I can't be in the classroom, I can be on the field," she says. "After you play rugby, you're thoroughly exhausted. It gets out a lot of aggression. I think I play rugby because of a need for personal challenge, not to be aggressive."

The women ruggers are a dedicated, hard working bunch. They practice for about an hour and a half Monday through Thursday. And they'll play in any weather conditions.

The team members expect that all the time spent on the sport they love will pay off.

"I don't see any problems with us going to nationals again this year," Sharon says. □

Ultimate fun flick of the wrist away

By JAY BLINDERMAN
Staff Writer

WHAT DO YOU CALL A GAME THAT'S A cross between basketball, football and soccer; but instead of using a ball, uses a flying disc? Well, you call it Ultimate Frisbee.

In its infancy, the Frisbee was a flying disc that was thrown between two or more people. But, like any great apparatus, skills were developed to enhance the use of the object.

The Frisbee, a piece of plastic that once was hurled freely by recreation-minded longhairs, is now the basis for a serious game that requires precision passing of the disc.

Texas A&M has an Ultimate Frisbee club that has 35 disc-throwing members. For the more serious member, the club sponsors both a women's and men's team for competition, says Suzanne Welder, a club officer.

The team practices Mondays through Thursdays at 5 p.m. on Henderson field, which is adjacent to the drill field. Practices are usually held regardless of weather conditions, Welder says, adding that she has no qualms about hitting the ground in the rain.

Seven people on each team are needed for a game, which is played on a field that measures 40 yards by 110 yards. But Ultimate is a pretty laidback game and often times the field is measured by someone simply pacing off the dimensions, says club member John St. Mary.

The rules for the game are written and distributed by the Ultimate Players Association. UPA membership isn't required to participate

with the A&M team, but team players have to join because membership is required to participate in some UPA events.

There are no referees in Ultimate, the game is based on the honor system. There are picks, fouls and holding violations, with infractions called by participating players.

"As lax as the rules are, it's a serious game," St. Mary says. "Some people practice for hours on throws and catches."

And practice they must, because throws and catches are the basis of the sport. A team scores by passing the Frisbee in succession from one end of the field to the end zone. A team scores one point for every pass caught in the end zone.

Mitzi Alexander, a women's team member, says teams playing a match decide how many points must be scored to win, but most tournaments are based on a 14 point game.

If a pass falls incomplete or is blocked, possession automatically changes. The team that lost possession becomes the defense and the new offense begins its quest toward the endzone.

Defensively, man for man coverage is used, resembling basketball and football. Like both games, a blown coverage can result in a score.

Offensively, the game resembles soccer because the game has a constant pace. It is similar to both soccer and football because of the running involved in getting open for a pass.

Ultimate also can be compared to basketball because, when a pass is caught, the receiver must establish a pivot foot. Moving the pivot foot results in a turnover in possession as would an attempt to dribble the Frisbee.

A&M just returned from the Regional Ultimate Frisbee competition which was held in Tallahassee at Florida State University. The

women's team won four matches but missed qualifying for the nationals by one match. The men's team didn't fair as well as the women's, returning home with only one regional win.

Michael Reily, a Frisbee thrower in high school, became a member of the A&M Ultimate team four years ago. Reily says he was walking by the drill fields his freshman year and saw an Ultimate game being played.

Since that time the sport has gained national recognition, Reily says. Other regional schools that compete in this Frisbee game include the University of Texas, North Texas State University, Tulane University and the University of Alabama.

And worldwide attention might be brought to the game with Ultimate on the slate of the 1988 Olympic Games as a feature sport.

Worldwide recognition is not on the minds of the team members at A&M. For the Aggie flingers, recruiting potential players is the hottest issue.

The team is always looking for players, especially since many players will be graduating, Reily says.

YOU COULD START OFF BARELY BEING able to throw a Frisbee and still become a good Ultimate player, Reily says. The people who already know how to throw have the potential to become great Ultimate players, he adds.

St. Mary says friends got him interested in the sport. He says when he joined the Ultimate club, he had limited disc control.

"If I'm not studying, sleeping or eating, I'm out playing Ultimate," St. Mary says. "Ultimate is my stress valve." □