

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)



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## Women's rugby finishes regular season 2-3

### Club team satisfied with performance young players brought this year

**By: McLean Bennett**

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Freshman Breanna Stace had only one day of practice under her belt when she got the call to play a full game for the women's rugby team this year.

She was, understandably, a bit unnerved.

"It was crazy just being thrown into the game," Stace said, adding she was "spinning in circles" and avoided touching the ball as much as possible during her first game.

What followed her nerve-wracking baptism into rugby, though, was a season of dramatic change, both for her and for the team. During the team's regular-season finale loss against Marquette University Saturday, Stace said the team "played a full 80 minutes of intensity" and showed marked improvement both in skill and chemistry.

Stace wasn't the only one who testified to the transformation. Junior Danielle Ryan, who sat out part of last season with an injury, also said this year's young team improved greatly over its five-game season, which saw the team finish 2-3.

"If you look at our record it's kind of hard to judge our team," Ryan said. "The improvement from our first game ... is just incredible, especially when you look at how the rookies have improved."

Ryan said the team brought on a number of fresh newcomers this season after several veterans either graduated or couldn't come back this year because of injuries. But by the end of the year, both she and Stace said the team had begun to click.

"The people that come to practice every day are just getting better each time," Stace said. "I think that our ability has really improved."

Ryan said it can be tough for newcomers to get the hang of rugby because most have never even watched a game - let alone played in one - before they came to college and joined the team.

And the sport, which Ryan said combines elements of soccer and football, requires grueling conditioning workouts and can be physically brutal.

Because players on the team are often new to the sport, learning how to adjust to its unique rules can pose another challenge for rookies, Ryan said.

"Most of the strategies that you learn in other sports - it's opposite in rugby," she said. "In rugby you can't pass the ball forward, you can't block people - all these other basic skills that you learn from all these other sports - rugby usually makes you deconstruct them and learn completely new strategies."

And then there are the injuries.

Ryan said concussions are the most common rugby injury, but added bruises and "wrenched" shoulders occur frequently too. Fractures are less common but not rare, Ryan said, a recipient of a wrist fracture herself.

"It's a contact sport with almost no protection, so injuries are going to happen," she said, adding most players wear mouth guards and a few players wear thin "scrum caps," but that other protection is almost nonexistent.

Given all the challenges posed to new players, Ryan said she was impressed this year by the improvement she saw and is excited for the team's spring season.

"I really hope that all the rookies that joined this year stick with it," Ryan said. "We have the potential for this to be a really important growing year and for us to come back really strong next year because all the rookies picked up everything so quickly."

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