

New Weston Rugby Club Promotes Fitness, Fairness and Family

BY STACEY BOMSER

RUGBY IS ONE OF THE fastest growing sports in the United States, and its popularity is expected to skyrocket with the return of rugby at the 2016 Olympics. Weston has always had a large number of rugby players and now hosts its own team, the Okapi Wanderers Rugby FC.

"The City of Weston is continually reviewing trends in athletics and responding with facility improvements or new programming as opportunities are presented," explains Don Decker, Weston's Director of Parks and Recreation. "Rugby is a growing program and we look forward to seeing these players out on our fields."

The Okapi Wanderers Rugby FC is officially sanctioned by the Weston Sports Alliance. In its first season, it is already the largest youth rugby club in Florida. It is open to players ages six to 17, with U10, U12, U14 and JV divisions.

What makes the Okapi Wanderers unique is that the non-profit club was created by and is run by parents. "Parent participation is what makes our club feel like a big family," shares Mariana Gallo, one of the founders of the club and current Director and



Communications Manager. Her two sons, Tomas and Franco, play on the team.

Gallo encourages any interested child to give rugby a try. "It doesn't matter their size, height, weight or speed. Anybody can be a rugby player."

She describes rugby as a fast-paced game derived from football (American soccer). "It features a combination of strength, speed and strategy to move the ball into an opponent's territory. All the players participate on the field,"

explains Gallo. "It is a team sport where sportsmanship, camaraderie, respect for the referee, the opposing team and your teammates is the priority."

She says it's these values that make rugby so appealing to players and parents. "Rugby provides a unifying spirit that leads to life-long friendships, teamwork and loyalty which transcends cultural, geographic, political and religious differences."

For the Okapi Wanderers, each game is more than a competition, it's a celebration. "Unlike most sports, after the game players and family from both teams stay for a traditional gathering," notes Gallo. "It's a way of building a sense of family among the team and

the rugby community."

As for the team name, Gallo says the players picked it and it has special significance. "An okapi is an animal made of a mix of giraffe, zebra and horse. The boys thought that name reflects us as a team, because we are all from different backgrounds, nationalities, and religions. We added Wanderers because in the beginning we did not have a field to train."

The Okapi Wanderers Rugby FC practices on Tuesday and Friday from 6-8pm at Weston Regional Park, Field #6. Home games are played at Tequesta Trace Park. The season runs through May and players can join at any time. For more information visit www.okapi-wanderersrugby.com.



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