

Okapi Wanderers Captures Third Consecutive State Championship

BY STACEY BOMSER

Another year, another win for the Okapi Wanderers Rugby Club. It's U14 team was crowned state champions at the Florida Youth Rugby Union tournament, after defeating the team from West Pines. Four other Okapi teams also played in the state finals: U10, U12, Junior Varsity, and Varsity. That's quite an accomplishment for a team that's only three years old. It took home three state championship trophies last year.

"We are so very proud of what we accomplished," states Mariana Gallo, Okapi Wanderers Rugby Marketing Chairperson. "Not only because we have won many titles, but because we are building such a great group of young athletes who are learning rugby values of sportsmanship, dedication and community service, and demonstrating these values on and off the field."

The Okapi Wanderers Rugby Club is an officially sanctioned sports league by the city's Weston Sports Alliance. Rugby is the fastest growing sport in the United States. Youth Rugby participation has increased over 25 percent in the past three years, and its popularity skyrocketed after rugby returned to the Olympic Games last summer after 92 years.

Registration opens next month for the Okapi Wanderers 2017-2018 season, which runs October through May. The Okapi Wanderers Rugby Club accepts players as young as six-years-old. It offers divisions for school-age players (U8, U10, U12, U14, Junior Varsity and Varsity) as well as a College division and Men's and



"Old Boys" league, for ages 35 and up. The teams practice and play at Tequesta Trace Park.

"We welcome new players. No experience is necessary," states Gallo. "Our coaches will teach you everything you need to know about the game. Since we have a minimum of two coaches per division, it is easier to focus on each player."

Outside of the regular rugby season, each summer the Okapi Wanderers Rugby Club partners with the Weston YMCA Family Center to offer a summer rugby camp. It focuses on fundamental and progressive rugby skills.

In addition to teaching new players, the Okapi Wanderers Rugby Club is committed to training new referees. This past summer, it hosted the Florida Rugby Referees Association's Level 1 course. Seventeen individuals became new rugby referees.

Gallo believes one of the reasons rugby is so popular is because it promotes respect. "Respect for the referee, the opposing team and your teammates is the top priority. Friendship, sportsmanship and camaraderie is what differentiates rugby from any other sport. These values make it appealing to both players and parents."

To register or for more information on the Okapi Wanderers Rugby Club visit www.okapiwanderersrugby.com or email info@okapiwanderersrugby.com.

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