

District rugby team works to build solid foundation

roughin' it with RUGBY

jordanmcentee
sports editor

Fog creeps its way across the top of the field. The stillness of the black night is broken when the BV rugby team takes to the turf.

“Ball, ball, ball!” One of them picks up the ball.

“Ruck, ruck, ruck!” One of them tackles the man with the ball.

“Down, down, down!” He falls to the cold turf and holds the ball behind him.

“Right, right, right!” Another offensive player tosses the ball to the side, and the drill continues.

rules of rugby

Terms to know:

Knock-on — When the ball is passed forward. Results in a turn over.

Scrum down — The bigger guys (the forwards) and the smaller guys (the backs) challenge position.

Ruck — Defending the ball.

Tri-zone — The endzone.

Touchlines — The sidelines.

Jumper — The man lifted up to grab the ball on a throw-in.

Scoring:

3 points — Drop kick or penalty kick through the posts.

5 points — Downward pressure on the ball in the try zone.

2 points — Kick the ball through the posts, only after a try is scored.

The district rugby team began practicing in January for its fourth season. The team is made up of boys from BV, BV West, BV Northwest and BV North.

Senior **Hank Kellerman** started playing for the rugby team his freshman year, the first year the team was created.

“It was kind of a spur-of-the-moment decision,” he said. “I checked it out freshman year, and I just said ‘Hey, I’ll give this a try.’”

The game of rugby has numerous rules and specifications, but Kellerman said both are easy to pick up.

“It started off being really confusing,” he said. “But at the first game everything started clicking, and it became really easy. So that’s what we tell the new guys, ‘Just wait ‘till the first game.’”

Coach **Matt O’Donnell** said rugby can be compared to a combination of several other sports.

“It all starts with a kickoff,” O’Donnell said. “Then from there, it’s a good mix of ideas from soccer, hockey and basketball. There’s a big focus on offensive to defensive transitions and switching the field.”

Rugby player senior **Mark Nichols** said the game requires athletes to stay in shape. Substitutions are made, but players must be fit enough to compete in the full 60-80 minutes every game.

“It’s really independent,” he said. “You have to be driven. You have to work by yourself to get fit, running and going to the gym. You have to be honest with yourself. If you don’t stay in shape, you don’t play. So it just makes everything more fun if you’re in shape.”

Kellerman said building up to the current team has taken quite a bit of recruiting.

“It’s taken a lot of one-on-one conversations with people,” he said. “If you keep bugging people, they eventually come out, then they get hooked on the sport.”

The district is in the process of starting a youth rugby team to prepare kids for the sport before they enter high school.

“Most guys come into high school not



Preparing to catch the ball, senior Hank Kellerman practices at the Overland Park Soccer Complex at a weekly rugby practice. Kellerman said he was very close to his teammates. “We were best friends after one practice, everyone is so close.” Kellerman said. **Photo by Olivia Roudebush.**

knowing the sport, never having played the sport and some of them have never even seen it on TV,” coach **John Cutter** said. “But here in Kansas City, we tend to get quite a few quality young adult players.”

Several boys on the rugby team previously played football.

“We get a lot of young guys exposed,” Cutter said. “Especially guys who leave football for one reason or another. It’s a drag to be third string and get no playing time in football. But with rugby, there are 15 different positions for 15 different body types. There’s something for everyone.”

Two of the coaches previously played for the U.S. National rugby team.

“We’re really lucky to have the six or seven coaches we have,” Kellerman said. “We’re always learning new stuff because every coach has something different to bring to the table.”

Kellerman said the most exciting mo-

ment on the rugby team was a fight with the team from Rockhurst High School last season.

“Somebody threw the first punch, then adrenaline started pumping, and next thing you know, everybody was throwing fists,” he said.

Even though the team focuses on performing well, Kellerman said they have their fair share of laughs.

“No one takes anyone seriously on our team,” he said. “Things get done but only after quite a few sarcastic comments. The coaches will be like, ‘All right, take a lap.’ Then somebody will say, ‘Um, I think I’m just going to go sit down.’ It’s a good time.”

Nichols said the boys on the team have become tight-knit throughout the years.

“When you play for a team that fights for every single game, there’s this sense of brotherhood,” he said. “It definitely keeps me coming back for more.”