

The Beginnings of U.S. Naval Academy Rugby

Although rugby was first played at the Naval Academy in 1962, seeds for a rugby program were planted much earlier by Mr. William H. Buffum, a professor in the Foreign Language Department. Mr. Buffum had played rugby at Princeton and was on the ALL East team which played against the touring Cambridge Rugby team in 1934. Mr. Buffum was hired by the Naval Academy in July 1941 and after the War, he began floating the idea of rugby with the Athletic Department, without success. In 1958, he decided to raise the ante by going to Captain Slade Cutter, the Director of Athletics, who, according to Buffum, responded to his overture, "rugby, who in the hell wants rugby?" Enter on the scene a few years later a new Athletic Director, Captain Bill Busick, and a Midshipman from Santiago, Chile, Luis A. Adriasola '63. Luis was playing on Navy's soccer team, but his real love was rugby. Through Luis' perseverance, Captain Busick agreed in the spring of 1962 to tentative trials of the game provided Luis could find people to play and someone to coach. Mr. Buffum's seeds sprouted as Luis tracked him down in the Language Department, securing not only Mr. Buffum's, but also his cohort in the Department, Lt. Paul Revak's commitment. (Buffum interview; usarmedforcesrugby.com History of USNA Rugby)

Word was promulgated in late spring '62 for those interested in learning about this new sport, rugby, to meet with Luis Adriasola '63 on Dewey Field. The 15 or so mids who showed up to learn the basics also received an effusion of enthusiasm from Luis on the great game of rugby and its potential at USNA. Subsequent rugby gatherings that spring were on Farragut Field with Mr. Buffum and Lt. Revak not only coaching, refereeing, and teaching with Luis, but also playing as there were often not enough mids out for a full scrimmage.

In the beginning, rugby was a winter and spring sport. Winter '62/63 was spent teaching a small nucleus of players the game, stirring battalion interest, and hyping the new sport in preparation for spring '63 Brigade competition where rugby replaced soccer in the intramural program. Lt Joe Fournier from the Physical Education Department joined Buffum and Revak in overseeing the new program. Rugby caught on quickly as by spring each Battalion had filled their rosters. The first Battalion rugby match was played 2 April 1963 and by the end of April, Luis' Second Battalion won the Brigade Rugby Championship. (Evening Capital Mar 28, '63, Splinter April 12, '63 and Annapolis Capital 3 May '63).

Brigade Championship Second Battalion team April '63 pictured below included the following: L. Adriasola '63, B. Andretta '65, E. Blake '64, J. Flynn '65, C. Fulford '66, J. Fyfe '65, A. Jones '65, E. Linz '65, B. MacAulay '64, D. Miller '66, G. Mayetani, '65, J. Moynehan '65, T. Murphy '65, J. Pender '66, W. Sickel '63, B. Tate '64, D. Saidman '63.



For Navy's first real rugby test, an All-Intramural Rugby team led by team recognized "captain" Luis Adriasola, had been formed from the battalions for an exhibition match 5 May '63 against an undefeated Baltimore First Fifteen team. (Annapolis Capital 3 May '63). Navy's All-Intramurals trailed at the end of the half 10-5, but eventually lost 28-5 when Baltimore's superior kicking game wore Navy down. With that knowledge, Baltimore's scrum half and captain, Allister Duckworth, offered his assistance to Buffum and company to help teach Navy the nuances of the kicking game and playing against more experienced players. On 12 May the All-Intramurals, having a little better feel for game mechanics, beat a good Washington Rugby Club 23-3. Navy Rugby's grand first season came to an end during June week '63. An "exhibition team" formed from three British frigates visiting East Coast destinations from Dartmouth (England's Naval Academy) was Navy's final match of the year and was beaten 13-0. (Evening Capital, 5 June '63). All in all, it was a very successful first rugby experience for Navy. Only Luis and one other player, John O'Dwyer '65, fullback, had played before. There were many standouts on that first team, but standing out among the "standouts" were Luis and Don Bonsper '65 who were overall high scorers.

Navy's '63 All-Intramural A Rugby team pictured below included the following: Coaches—Buffum, Fournier, Revak. Players—L. Adriasola '63, R. Bancroft '65, D. Bonsper '65, E. Blake '64, F. Corah '65, B. Friedrick '65, J. Fyfe '65, J. Halenza '65, B. MacAuley '64, J. O'Dwyer '65, P. Parotti '63, W. Sickel '63, B. Tate '64, B. Williams '64



Navy's '63 All-Intramural Rugby players pictured below includes some of the following: Coaches—Buffum, Fournier, Revak, and Duckworth (Baltimore): Players-- L. Adriasola '63, E. Blake '64, R. Bancroft '65, D. Bonsper '65, F. Corah '65 J. Flynn '65, B. Friedrick '65, C. Fulford '66, J. Fyfe '65, J. Halenza '65, A. Jones '65, D. Miller '66, B. MacAuley '64, D. Norton '65, J. O'Dwyer '65, P. Parotti '63, J. Pender '66, W. Sickel '63, E. Stillman '65, B. Tate '64, B. Williams '64



Luis A. Adriasola '63, Navy's rugby advocate, rugby coach, and rugby captain graduated in 1963 and went back to Chile. Perhaps Luis was just the right guy, in the right place, at the right time, with the right message. Both Army and Air Force already had established rugby programs and Professor Emerson P. Smith, Sports Program Supervisor, had made a trip the middle of April '63 to Colorado Springs to determine how their program would fit at USNA. (Splinter, 12 April '63). Whoever the key "background players" were at that particular time, it is certain that Luis was instrumental, not only behind the scenes, but as well in the introduction of the sport to the Brigade, and its early successes. After his departure Second Battalion repeated as Brigade Intramural Champions lead by three first classmen who prospered from Luis' leadership—back Ernie Blake and forwards Bill MacAuley and Bill Tate. (Splinter, 15 May '64).

While there was no formal rugby competition during the winter '63/64, that did not preclude daily informal competition between battalions gearing up for the spring or for a place on what was now called "The Brigade Rugby Team", as it became the focus of the winter rugby activity. The strength and intensity of the battalion intramural program was undeniably a major factor in the rapid growth and maturity of Naval Academy rugby. An exhibition game with the Baltimore Club in mid-April '64 reflected the effort put forward by battalion players during the winter practices. "The Brigade Rugby Team" that was pulled together beat Baltimore 19-0. BZ's were afforded to no less than seven team members, Andy Simon-Pietri '66, Jim Pender '66, Bob Friedrich '65, Frank Corah '65, Don Bonsper '65, Judd Hallenza '65 and Jay Fyfe '65 reflecting the team work and team effort put forward. (Splinter 24 April '64). In two short years, rugby at the Naval Academy became a well-established phenomenon which included intense Brigade competition and a "Club" team that could play well against the best area clubs. The word on Navy's success had spread quickly by the spring '64. Offers to play were received from Fordham, Princeton, Loyola of Chicago, and Virginia, however, as rugby was not yet sanctioned by NAAA, these matches never materialized. (Splinter, 10 April 1964). The Baltimore and Washington Clubs were always eager to put Navy on their schedules and through the spring of '65 were the only other Club teams played. ***

*** (note) besides the sources indicated above where indicated, 12 members of the 63 team were contacted for their input early Navy Rugby history....

The 1964 "A" Rugby Team pictured below includes some of the following coaches and team members: Coaches; Fournier, Buffum, Revak. Players; R. Bancroft '65, E. Blake '64, R. Bohner '67, D. Bonsper '65, F. Corah '65, B Davidson '65, B. Friedrick '65, J. Fyfe '65, J. Halenza '65, T. Lynch '64, J. O'Dwyer '65, J. Pender '66, A Simonpietri '66, B. Tate '64, B. MacAulay '64, B. Williams '64



The 1965 "A" Rugby Team pictured below includes some of the following coaches and team members: Coaches; Buffum, Linz. Players; R. Bancroft '65, D. Bonsper '65, D. Burrows '65, F. Corah '65, B. Davidson '65, B. Friedrich '65, J. Fyfe '65, J. Halenza '65, C. Hess '65, A. Jones '65, D. Lawley '65, D. Miller '66, J. O'Dwyer '65, J. Pender '66, D. Platt '65, E. Stillman '65, A. Simonpietri '66.

