



# VICTORY AND GLORY

CAL POLY CLUB SPORTS WINS MORE THAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

BY SCOTT ROARK

ADRENALINE, A LOT OF FUN, a little pain, and memories that will last a lifetime.

The Cal Poly Club Sports Program has these in abundance, with sports clubs that are hard-hitting, driven and dirty. Other clubs require more strategy and calculation, replacing teamwork with self-reliance.

But all clubs continue to make their mark on the state and national sports scenes, securing multiple championships, forging personal bonds, and providing a foundation for real-world leadership and management skills for students.

The Cal Poly Club Sports Program, founded nearly two decades ago, is completely separate from NCAA Athletics. It is comprised of 21 club teams with more than 850 students, competing hard in such sports as rugby, lacrosse, water polo, soccer, volleyball, surfing, sailing and fencing.

According to Club Sports Program Coordinator Everett Brooks, the program is primarily student-run, classified as other clubs on campus with minimal funding. The program operates like any business selling a product – each team tries to brand and promote itself as the best, even though their abilities are limited by a lack of resources. “Sponsorships and private support are critical,” he said.

Each team elects their own officers who report directly to Brooks, who in turn coordinates general sports club activities. Coaches, many of them unpaid volunteers, are responsible for scheduling practices, travel, publicity and competitive events. Many teams pay their own travel expenses, relying on alumni support to make it through the season.

A prime example of this is the Cal Poly Rugby Program, started in 1966 by Cal Poly football players. A colorful history has been a fitting prelude to where the rugby program is today, having garnered national and international respect, and playing top contenders such as San Diego State and Arizona State.

Cal Poly Rugby has been ranked in the nation’s top 10, and over the years has traveled to Fiji, Ireland and Wales. Domestically Cal Poly rugby has played Penn State and Ohio State, beating the latter on their home turf as underdogs in 1999.

Like many Club Sports Programs, alumni support has been critical according to current head coach and former Cal Poly rugby player **Nick Massman (ET ’93)**. The six-figure travel and operating budget is fully funded by the parents, supporters and alumni of the rugby club, which pays for its own trainers, facilities and medical staff. The program typically has more than 130 players at the season’s start.

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(L) Grant Dismuke, (Below, L-R) Alex Pappas, Benjamin Cannon, Dismuke and Ryder “The Boss” Ross





“Our network of dedicated alumni is one of our greatest assets,” Massman said. “Many of these individuals played rugby here years ago – but are still active with the program, mentoring our current players and providing critical support as needed. Their dedication really speaks to the power of this program.” Alumni have also established an academic scholarship for rugby players, with the first award scheduled this academic year.

Team captain **Benjamin Cannon (BRAE)** calls rugby a “huge part” of his experience as a Cal Poly student. “It’s a great way to meet people, make great friends, travel, and make the college experience a lot better,” he said. “It helps students feel like they belong to something and gives everyone something in common.”

This sentiment is echoed by the members of the Cal Poly Women’s Lacrosse Program, another successful sports club which had its beginning in 1991. The team has won seven national championships in the last eight years. Not bad for an organization that does its own fundraising and relies on donations from friends and family.

“We pay for our own equipment, practice five days a week, and play games on the weekends with full class schedules,” said team captain **Laura Hobson (REC)**. “The commitment level is phenomenal – you couldn’t meet a more determined group of women anywhere.”

Great memories abound for Hobson and her teammates. “I remember walking onto the field of Mile High Stadium in Denver to play in my first national championship,” recalls **Sarina Madnick (BUS)**. “It started snowing in the second half. It was a beautiful sight.”

More than 40 women compete on two teams for the lacrosse program. The “B team” is a competitive training ground for the “A team,” which competes on a national scale.

Other notable club sports programs include men’s and women’s water polo, which both won national championships last year. The coaches with both programs, **Matt Landre (BIO ’01, MBA ’03)**, Bobby Erzen and Dirk Camilli, were named national coaches of the year.

“These programs are great examples of what students and their supporters can do,” said Brooks. “They win the hearts and minds of students and prepare them for the teamwork skills needed in the professional world. The effort and sacrifice pay countless dividends in the end.” □

Editor’s note: More information about Cal Poly Club Sports can be found online at <http://studentlife.calpoly.edu/spo/index.asp>. Information about Cal Poly Rugby can be found at [www.calpolyrugby.com](http://www.calpolyrugby.com).



(Below, back row, L-R):  
Jaime Oetman, Laura  
Hobson, and Katie  
Stoddard (Front row,  
L-R): Jackie Bierre and  
Sarina Madnick



