

NOJO brings new culture to New Jersey



Club President, Andrew Brown (center), gets up close and personal with a Gotham tackler.

By Saher Almaita
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The giant field lights cause the drops of rain to stand out with stunning clarity. The frigid water begins to pool, as the thick mud on the cratered field becomes saturated. Men in various states of action breathe mist into the cold night air, as orders are belted across the field. Graceful ball movements alternate with violent collisions.

North Jersey Rugby Football Club is back.

The members, from college students to married men with families, come together every Tuesday and Thursday night at nearby Flagg Field in Hawthorne. A group of students from William Paterson University is playing on the team until they can start their

own.

Merely watching the North Jersey team's practices can prove exhausting as the players move constantly through various drills. This sort of training is necessary as the 80-minute game blends the stamina of soccer with the brute strength of football.

The club is a Division III team in the Metropolitan New York Rugby Football Union, which caters to all age and experience levels for tri-state area teams.

What the average American knows about rugby is very limited. It's violent, like football without pads, one might say. To the untrained eye a rugby match may just look like a mass of humanity playing Kill the Man With the Ball. However, someone with knowledge of the sport will recognize its highly technical

and strategic nature.

The apparent disorganization of rugby lies in the fact that players share responsibilities on the field.

"Unlike American sports where there are assigned roles and positions, you have the freedom to do other things as well...and get the job done," Club President Andrew Brown said.

Those who play rugby often become addicted.

"It's the sports equivalent to crack," said Junior Bill Hoffman. "Once you get involved, you never want to give it up."

Brown commented on the phenomenon. "If you're even slightly interested, the sooner [you join] the better, 'cause even if you don't stick with it you won't regret it."

And what would possess an individual to do something as

arduous and potentially damaging as rugby? Teams become a close-knit group of individuals.

"Win or lose, nothing changes the camaraderie," Brown said. Rugby is a grassroots movement in America, gaining popularity through immigrants who brought the game over, and college students who are drawn to the game. College sport powerhouses Texas, Florida, Ohio State, and University of Miami have established teams.

The North Jersey Rugby Football Club is always looking for new members.

More information can be found at www.northjerseyrugby.com