

# VOICE

*of  
The  
Hill*

Kick back,  
Capitol Hill. It's  
summer!

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# West Potomac Rugby Football Club

A Tradition of *Excedi Universum*

BY AUTUMN KUEI



West Potomac vs. George Mason. (Photo by Bill Amatucci/Rising Star Imaging)

**R**ugby. The word commands respect and appreciative nods to the field. The image is of big guys butting heads and running with an oval ball like their football cousins, but without protection. For all its popularity as the third-most popular team sport in the world, rugby has enjoyed a reputation more of brute strength than skill.

There remains a misconception that former football players make the best rugby players. In fact, rugby is an offshoot from soccer in the early 1800s. Unlike their soccer cousins, rugby players are allowed to pick up the ball with their hands and run with it. Rugby players can make full contact whether they are going or not going after the ball.

There are 15 positions in rugby

made up of forwards and backs. Each position is assigned a number. The number on the jersey tells you the player's position.

On Capitol Hill, the West Potomac Rugby Football Club ([www.dcrugby.org](http://www.dcrugby.org)) enjoys a brotherhood that has drawn people from all over the DC Metro area. Since its inception in 1963, West Potomac has remained one of the oldest active rugby clubs in DC, as well as being the second oldest men's club in the DC Metro area.

West Potomac is a Division III (D3) team, which according to the USA Rugby rules means these men like to socialize and welcome players with limited experience and time. As former West Potomac Captain Ken Johnson says, "A lot of people think we are crazy to play such a violent sport. In reality, our team is made up

mostly of professionals who enjoy the exercise and camaraderie of playing club rugby..."

The captain is elected each season by the team and works with the coach and two other elected "selectors" to set the starting lineup each week. During the match, he calls plays and makes strategic decisions. He is also responsible for managing team conduct and serves as liaison between the referee and his players. At practice, he is an assistant coach who helps run training and instructional sessions. Off the field, the captain is a point of contact for team members who have questions on rugby and non-rugby related matters.

Johnson recently stepped down as team captain due to the birth of his daughter. The current team captain is Robb Stout, recently voted "Team

MVP" and "Forward of the Year."

"[Johnson] has gone from taking care of us to taking care of his family," Stout explains. "This illustrates one of the great things about our team as well as other D3 clubs: a fundamental understanding that individuals have dynamic lives and shifting priorities." Players can scale back their team participation without being stigmatized as quitters.

## The Rugger Roll Call

Some Hill neighbors you may recognize on the team are listed below. The colorful cast of characters includes many more who work on the Hill or are former Hill residents.

Name	Position
<b>"Sideshow" Robb Stout</b>	Lock (Captain/ Recruiting Chairman)
<b>Sam "Flintstone" Reister</b>	Lock/Prop
<b>"Sneaky" Pete Belli</b>	Scrum Half
<b>Pavol Popovic</b>	Wing (Match Secretary)
<b>Sebastian Solari</b>	Scrum Half/ Fly Half
<b>Ken Johnson</b>	Lock/Prop
<b>"Hotdog" Jack Tisne</b>	Wing/Center

The Club is well known for their willingness to "initiate" new ruggers. Since D2 and D3 teams generally receive limited funds from sponsors, players pay dues and other related expenses. Dues are \$90 per season (March through May and September through November), which covers membership in the Potomac Rugby Union (liability, general management and referees) as well as field rental fees and team equipment. Players are responsible for individual equipment like shorts and shoes and travel expenses. Therefore, D2 and D3 teams generally compete against teams within a limited geographic area.

West Potomac has a Young Boy (19 years old and up) and an Old Boy (35 years old and up) side. There is also an active traveling side called the Washington Area Rugby Touring Side (WARTS). Recently, the WARTS toured New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland, Netherlands, Wales and Taiwan. Besides playing games that consist of the usual 15 verses 15 players, the WARTS played in an invitational 7's rugby tournament in Amsterdam (Netherlands), which are games that consist of 7 verses 7 players.

For Brotherhood, Community and Beyond  
One of its many claims to fame

(besides being sponsored by the Pour House) is that the team has been featured in Rugby Magazine due to the large number of active/retired military that are club members. Many recruits are from the Navy Yard and the Marine Barracks on 8th Street. The Club is proud of its relationships with the Navy and the Marines. A spirited but friendly rivalry exists between West Potomac and the Marine Rugby Club of Quantico.

When not on the field, these rugers may be found in the water. They competed in the 2003 DC Dragon Boat races for fun and ended up winning 4 of 5 events entered. They trained for the event with the Capitol Rowing Club. As a result of the esprit de corps the rugers brought to the event, they were invited to represent the region at a race in Taipei. The 2004 Taiwan Tour was covered by Rugby Magazine. West Potomac will participate in the 2005 DC Dragon Boat races.

West Potomac practices on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:30-9 p.m. at King Green Leaf Field. Spring

practices will remain Tuesdays/Thursdays until the first or second week in May. Post-practice debriefings are held at the Pour House's Scheisse Haus, where the rugers toast past and future victories and chant in honor of the Club motto Excedi Universum (Latin for "Everything in Excess"):

- Everything in excess
- Strength on the field.
- Courage in the scrum.
- Determination in the face of adversity.
- Peace among brothers.
- Sincerity in word and deed.
- Loyalty to family.
- Beer!
- Perseverance in getting beer.

#### Involvement in the Hill Community

West Potomac's involvement with the Hill community increased with the events of September 11, 2001. Practices at Bowling AF Base in SE ceased due to heightened security on military bases. Shortly after,

Sullivans (near Department of Labor), the team's sponsor bar, closed down. Because a large number of players lived and/or worked on the Hill, the team developed a sponsor relationship with The Pour House.

West Potomac first arranged practices at Watkins Elementary, then moved to Payne Elementary. The relationship at Payne involved assisting the school with an annual Halloween party for local kids. The team has lost their home, since Payne restructured their athletic fields. The King Green Leaf (located on 201 N St., SW) is a temporary home. This fall the team is dedicated to finding a more permanent Hill-based home.

The basic requirements for a playing field are that it must be the size of a youth soccer field and be well-lit for after-dark practices. The club will work with an existing field to install lights and/or use portable lights that would be owned by the team.

West Potomac is eager to become involved in more after-school activities and have offered landscaping

and contractor services to make significant improvements to the fields in the past. The club always cleans the fields and surrounding areas of trash on a weekly basis to help the schools maintain their grounds.

And as membership grows, the club plans to formalize youth rugby programs in the DC area. Club members will coach and referee as well as work with physical education departments on ways to introduce a non-contact version of the sport into schools. Speaking as the Recruiting Chairman, Stout says, "We almost always spark the interest of kids and adults alike who have never seen the sport, and take time to explain it to people who are curious. We also bring positive activity to what would otherwise be darkened recreational areas that are often in danger of becoming high-risk zones for illicit behavior."

*Hill resident Autumn Kuei is a frequent Voice contributor.*

## Walking to the Nationals game?



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