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Alabama Women's Rugby Team Tackles Tradition

TUSCALOOSA, Ala.- On a field just a few blocks from Saban Field at Bryant-Denny Stadium, players collide with an amount of force to make the ground shake. Players run, tackle and tumble into the grass- no pads, no helmets just hardcore determination. The University of Alabama's club women's rugby team isn't chasing trophies. They are building something much tougher- a space of their own in a state that revolves around football.

In a town where Saturdays are sacred and the roar of the crowd is reserved for the gridiron; Alabama's women's rugby team is carving out its own identity. The team, made up of students across campus, practices twice a week late at night and competes against other programs alike. For them, this sport is about endurance, community and grit.

Freshman Carly Silva says rugby demands more than just being strong- it requires constant motion and full awareness of surroundings.

“Rugby versus football is actually quite different,” Silva said. “Rugby is more physically exhausting and physically demanding because football – you just make a play and then stop and reset. Rugby is very on the go. You're running up the field, you get tackled and then you have to roll over and hope your teammate is right behind you.”

Unlike football, rugby players wear very minimal protective gear. The game is played in two 40-minute halves with very few stops in the game. Meaning stamina is very important in this game.

During practice, players can be seen sprinting up and down the field tackling and diving for the ball. It is very intense, but sophomore Sadie Maierhofer says that's what keeps her coming back.

"Rugby – so much fun," Maierhofer said. "But it's a very physical sport. I am covered in bruises, and I have had five concussions so far. It's a lot of physical contact. But it's so much fun. It is dangerous though. EMS are always at our games."

Despite the bruises and broken bones, Maierhofer says this sport gives players confidence that goes beyond the field. The intensity of the game builds a bond among teammates that very few other sports can match.

President of Women's Rugby, Sydney Ezekiel, says that the sense of unity is what makes the team special. "A lot of our players come in not knowing much about rugby," Clark said. "By the end of the semester, they're tackling and rucking like veterans. It's not just about being tough – it's about learning to rely on your teammates."

For many players, the camaraderie keeps them coming back despite the toll on their bodies. After long days in class, practice is their outlet to release stress. The field is a space to build friendships while also proving something, not just to others but to themselves.

At the end of practice, the team huddles up, covered in sweat and dirt, enjoying each other's company. There's no scoreboard, but no one would be able to tell, their energy is electric.

At a school known for national championships and Heisman winners, Alabama women's rugby team is redefining what it means to be an athlete. Playing for each other, not fame or scholarships.

Their season will pick back up in March.