



# Celebrating 50 years of NU Trailblazers!

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## From Love Affair to Legendary: NU Women's Rugby Program



1984 NU Women's Rugby Team

Norwich University's women's rugby program is rooted in the daring dreams of Theresa Maggio '84, Sue Hall '85, and Betsy Pendergast VC'84.

Betsy and Sue were returning from a field hockey game against UVM when the idea bubbled up. They had seen NU's men's team in action and were fascinated by the sport. They noted that UVM had a women's rugby team. Theresa, who had played on Johnson State College's team, arrived at Norwich that fall to work on a master's degree. She was enthusiastic about recruiting a women's team as well, so the three hatched a plan.



2014 NCAA Div. I Rugby 7s National Champions - NU Women's Rugby

Over the winter of 1983-84, excitement began to build on both the Norwich and Vermont College campuses. While the women were eager to give the game a try, they faced some naysayers. Some scoffed at the idea of women playing such a physical sport. Others saw it as competition for the small pool of women athletes on campus.

Undaunted, the NU Women's Rugby Team was formed and played their first match in the spring of 1984. Theresa recalls, "We decided to wear black jerseys that first year because NU didn't want anything to do with us." She personally lined the pitch for the first home game due to the lack of support from the athletic department. "Once we were up and running, I never had to line the field again," she says.

Karen Abel '86, a member of the inaugural season said, "Betsy recruited players, organized practices and lined up teams for us to play against. We had an absolute blast and immediately fell in love with it." Their love affair laid the foundation for a program that is celebrating 40 years in 2024.

Fast forward twenty years and the club sport was a Division II team when Coach Austin Hall arrived at Norwich in 2004. Under his guidance, women's rugby garnered unparalleled success not previously seen by any NU team. With back-to-back top-five finishes in the

Division II National Championships, the switch to varsity status in 2008, and the selection of All-American Sybil Taunton '08, Norwich's program rose to national prominence.

The watershed moment arrived during the 2011-12 season when the Cadets secured their first of many national championships. The team showcased incredible resilience and skill, clinching the USA Rugby 7s National Championship in Texas. With key players like Katie Hathaway '12 and Hannah Bushey '12 leading the charge, alongside Rose Bernheim '14, Joya Clark '14 and Baylee Annis '14, the Cadets demonstrated their offensive prowess, paving the way for an era of rugby glory.

Building on that momentum, the 2012-13 team, captained by Emily Baugus '13, elevated the program to greater heights. The Cadets won the 2012 USA Rugby College 7's National Championship in Texas in December, defeating Sam Houston State, Ohio State, Stanford, Harvard, Texas, and Navy en route to the title. Although they fell short in the Division I 15s National Championship that year, the Cadets' indomitable spirit shone through. Their remarkable comeback victory against Stanford University in the semifinals was historic.

To date, the Norwich's Women's Rugby program has captured six national championships and finished second in two others. Five of those titles were won against Division I schools from the big Power Five conferences.

The program is now led by Head Coach Baylee Annis '14, a member of the 2011-12 and 2012-2013 championship teams and standout student-athlete. Coach Annis proudly states that "Norwich Rugby is steeped in incredible success, talented athletes, and at the heart of that are the incredibly good and kind people who are committed to be in service to others." Ashley Potvin-Fulford '11 summed up the team's ethos this way, "In rugby and life, you must be willing to do it all: carry the ball, support other people, ask for help and support when you need it, be someone to lean on, get comfortable leaning on others, be lifted and lift someone else."

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*NU Women's Rugby will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the program during Homecoming Weekend (September 19-22) with a BBQ lunch and Exhibit at the Rugby Clubhouse on Friday, Rugby game on Saturday afternoon, and Scrum Alum Dinner and Anniversary Celebration on Saturday night. For more information: [alumni.norwich.edu/HC/Schedule](http://alumni.norwich.edu/HC/Schedule)*

### **Attend a Women Kicking Glass Event.**

- Saturday, May 18, 2024 [Women Kicking Glass So. California Gathering](#), Los Angeles, CA
- Sunday, June 23, 2024 - [Washington DC Women Kicking Glass Reception](#), Military Women's Memorial, Arlington, VA
- Friday, September 20, 2024 - [Women Kicking Glass Gala](#), Plumley Armory, Norwich