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Women's Rugby, Motivations for Females to Participate and Consume the Sport of Rugby

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(including questions)**

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The sport of rugby has a long history in Europe with its roots in England in the early to mid-1800's (Baker 1981). In the United States, it is recorded that the first rugby game played on American soil happened in 1874 in Cambridge Massachusetts between Harvard and McGill University of Montreal (USA Rugby, 2012). The sport of rugby saw a great amount of growth in the US in the early 1900s, especially after it was included in the Olympics. The American men won the gold medal in Rugby in the 1920 and 1924 Olympics before the sport was discontinued in the games. Now, 88 years later, a form of rugby is returning to the Olympic Games. This impending event begs the question, why are athletes participating in the sport of rugby, and more specifically why are women participating? This is the question that this study seeks to answer, by looking at the motivations of female rugby players both as participants and consumers of the sport.

According to the US Women's Rugby Foundation, the first record of women playing the game of rugby was not until 1972, that is ninety-eight years after the first rugby game in America. The governing organization of rugby union in the United States, USA Rugby as it is called today, was founded in 1975 in Chicago, Illinois (USA Rugby, 2012). The Women's National Team played its first game in 1987 against Canada. Then, four years later in 1991 the first Women's World Cup was held in Cardiff, Wales (USWRF, 2012). These numbers and late rise of the women's game begs the question as to why the women were not closer to the growth of the men's game. One explanation may be found in Fallon and Jome's research on gender-role conflict. They found that despite the numerous benefits to athletic participation by women, they face conflict when playing sports that are typically male-dominated like rugby. Fallon and Jome commended the women rugby players they interviewed for the coping strategies put into place in order to deal with the gender-role conflicts they encountered.

There has not been a significant amount of research into the motivation for females to play rugby. The study of motivation in general, however, has multiple studies from the psychology discipline as well as other disciplines. One study that did look at participation by women in the sport of rugby was one done by Murray and Howat (2009), they used the enrichment hypothesis to explain participation in women's rugby in Australia. The enrichment hypothesis proposes that non-traditional leisure choices require exposure to an environment that provides both an awareness of and support for such choices (as cited in Murray and Howat, p. 65, 2009). This Australian study only interviewed 40 female union players and found support for the enrichment hypothesis in the answers given to their interview questions. The athletes responded that they played because they knew others that participated, had family support, and the ongoing social aspect of the sport kept them coming back. In a spate study that looked specifically at college students, it was found that students were motivated by more intrinsic motivations than those who participated in regular exercise (Kilpatrick, Herbert, and Bartholomew, p. 87, 2005). Motivations can be looked under the scope of social-cognitive theory which states that there are three postulates that physical activity are based on: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and self-evaluated satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Netz and Raviv, p. 35, 2004). This study also used Australians as subjects and found differences in motivations and can be associated with age as well as gender. This will be beneficial as the proposed study goes forward.

All this history and building has led the sport of rugby to where it is today. In 2016, a form of rugby called Rugby 7's will be included in the Olympics in Rio De Janeiro. A study commissioned by MasterCard through the Centre for the International Business of Sport showed that there was a 340% increase in rugby participation in the United States since 2004 (MasterCard, 2010). That same study pointed out that in 2011, was the first time that the United States had participation numbers that put it into the Top 10 Rugby playing countries worldwide. Administrators need to be able to harness the upcoming Olympics to market rugby to new players and motivate current players. One drawback to the 7's format being added to the Olympics is that the majority of America is playing 15's rugby. This puts added pressure on USA Rugby to shift focus to the game of 7's and to creating opportunities for women to play and excel at

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the game. In November 2011, USA Rugby announced that 15 men and 8 women would be the first residents for Olympic training at the Chula Vista Olympic Training Center in California. The discrepancy between men's players and women's players was immediately evident to the world of women's rugby and may have an impact on women's players seeking to play at the next level.

This large increase in participation begs the question as to why the participants are playing the game, especially females. Rugby has historically been a male dominated sport as evidenced by the late emergence of the women's game in the US. USA Rugby reports that in 2010-2011 there were 685 female clubs throughout these three levels. The college level has the highest number of registered female clubs at 343, followed by high school with 209 and the senior level reported 133 female clubs. This study will look for motivations in participation in the sport of rugby by females at each level, as well as asking the participants how long they have been playing. This study will utilize questionnaires and distribute them to teams throughout the country in order to generate a diverse response. The survey will initially be distributed to team representatives that are listed on the rosters on USARugby.org. If this does not invoke the number of responses desired, a mass distribution will be required. In order to obtain a decent representation of female rugby players in the United States, the researchers will solicit responses from at least 30 teams at each level. For the purposes of this study, a full team response will be 25 athletes. The teams that are initially chosen will be spread out across the country so there is not a regional bias.

This study will further the idea of the enrichment hypothesis, that a person's environment has a large impact on their decision to play and continue playing the sport of rugby. The study will also give administrators across the country a better idea of why women are playing, and then allow them to market their programs accordingly. The researchers hope that the responses might indicate women are looking for a contact sport to play, which might help advance women's rugby in the realm of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). As of right now, women's rugby is classified as an emerging sport and needs universities to sponsor it so it can become a championship sport. If this study shows that there is a need to be filled in the type of sports that are offered to women, especially at the collegiate level, it could be step in the right direction to get programs to sponsor the sport. Overall, this study aims to assist in the growth of the sport of women's rugby and in turn, help the USA to attain consistent competitiveness internationally. The sport is growing, women want to play and administrators need to pay attention and react to the growing demand.