



# Principia Rugby Wins 2013 USA Rugby 7s DII National Championship

November 27 2013 9:21 AM

A crowd of cheering students greeted Principia College's rugby team, the Thunder Chickens, late Sunday night to help celebrate their first USA Rugby 7s DII National Championship.

During Saturday's first game of round robin play, played in Greensboro, North Carolina, Principia faced Emory University, a DIII school of nearly 8,000 undergraduates located in Atlanta, Georgia. The Thunder Chickens came out with tunnel vision, scoring within the first 45 seconds. Emory's defense couldn't keep up with the speed and fluidity of senior Naveed Hosseinmardi from Texas, junior Jordan Anderson, also from Texas, and Trevor Marunde, a senior from Illinois. In the end, Principia won decisively, 47-5. "The first game was a good mental marker for us," comments Coach Ward Patterson.

The second game, against Lafayette College, a DII school in Easton, Pennsylvania, with approximately 2,400 students, was more competitive, but Principia still won handily, 38-12. "Lafayette is a good team and played hard ball," Patterson says. "They made us work hard for the victory."

Principia's third and final game on Saturday, against James Madison University, a school of 18,000 undergraduates in Harrisonburg, Virginia, was Principia's only loss—and the opponent's only win that day. The Thunder Chickens struggled during this game, losing 10-12. "For some reason, the oil fell out of the engine," Patterson notes. "We were just fumbling, we couldn't catch a ball, we couldn't pass a ball. We tried to stop it, but it just rolled right through to the end of the game." Although it was a tough loss, it served as a great wake-up call, and the team remained the leader in their bracket, well positioned for the semifinal and final games on Sunday.

Putting the loss to James Madison behind them, the Thunder Chickens emerged Sunday morning focused on their semifinal match against Sonoma State University, a northern California school of about 8,400 undergraduates. In spite of temperatures below

freezing—unusual for the area—Principia prevailed. The team gave up an early score but soon responded with three unanswered tries, going on to win 19–5.

In the championship game later that day, Principia faced the University of Wisconsin-Stout, a DIII university with roughly 8,200 undergraduates. Though they were a good team with a strong defense, Principia controlled the field from the beginning, taking an early lead. “I was a bit rattled when UW scored 12 points in a blink after we were up 22–0,” Patterson recalls. “But we pulled it out.” The Thunder Chickens defeated UW-Stout 27–12 to win the National Championship.

Principia’s journey during conference play is an impressive story, too. The Thunder Chickens worked their way through opponents in the 15s and 7s to win the Conference Championship in both formats! Their motto for the season—“Win both and then decide”—had come true. Since the 15s and 7s National Championships took place the same weekend, however, the team had a choice to make, and the 7s won out.

Less experienced in the 7s than some of his players, Coach Patterson attributes much of the group’s success to Marunde and Hosseinmardi, who trained and competed for the El Azul 7s Rugby Club. “Their experience was massive and helped the rest of the team succeed in 7s strategy and play,” Patterson freely acknowledges.

Asked how Principia, a small DIII liberal arts college with just under 500 students, earned the USA Rugby 7s DII National Championship, Patterson explains, “The guys had to shift gears from thinking, ‘Here we are at Principia and we play rugby,’ to asking, ‘What’s achievable? What’s our goal?’” Recognizing the importance of a new rule that allows teams to advance to Nationals after winning their conference (instead of having to go through Sectionals and Regionals play as well), Patterson encouraged the players to set their sights accordingly. Last spring, during a team meeting, each player signed his name on a white board in the locker room that proclaimed Nationals as the group’s goal. Patterson said, “That put them in control of their outcome; they made the decision to go to Nationals. That changes the mentality; it empowers or gives authority to the coach to push harder and harder. They made the decision, so we worked hard.”

That hard work was soon recognized as the team started to experience more success. “When you are 10–0 in a 7s program, that’s an automatic magnet,” Patterson notes. “The players want to be involved; they want to improve. The team checked their motives, maintained their humility, and remembered what they play for and why they love the game.”

Denying that there’s a magic formula to his coaching, Patterson says simply, “I don’t accept mediocrity—I just don’t. I treat the men as adults. When freshman athletes arrive, I understand they need to play catch-up, but I expect decisions to be made on a

very mature basis. I don't coach rugby, I really don't—I coach character education, and I use rugby to get there.”

Though they're excited about future possibilities, Patterson and his team are pausing first to celebrate. “I think it's important to take a moment to acknowledge what's happened,” he says. “That's a very natural and good thing. If you do it with respect and joy, I don't have any problem with that.”

*About Principia College:*

*Principia College is a century-old co-educational institution whose campus, designed by Bernard Maybeck and located on 300-foot bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River in Elsah, Illinois, has been designated a National Historic Landmark. Historically, the College has placed significant emphasis on educating its students for global citizenship. Today's student body represents 38 states and 31 nations. Principia College is an NCAA Division III school.*