History of Gonzaga Rugby

Rugby at Gonzaga dates back to the fall of 1987, when a group of students formed a club called “Eye Street Rugby.” The club began playing as part of the six-team Potomac Rugby Union (PRU) High School Division in the spring of 1988. They recorded only one win in their first two seasons—an inauspicious and humble beginning.

The 1990s: Gaining Varsity Status

The 1990s saw a steady increase in the number of players and the number of victories. In 1994, the team gained varsity status at the school and the team’s name changed to Gonzaga Rugby. In 1998, the team won its first PRU championship and had its first visit to the National Championship, where they placed third.

The 2000s: Establishing Regional Dominance

This decade saw Gonzaga dominating the region under the direction of current Director of Rugby Lee Kelly. The team also started the tradition of taking an annual trip on spring break—touring such destinations as the Cayman Islands, England and Wales, Ireland, France, Spain, Argentina, and Uruguay. The tours gave the players and teams the chance to play against more experienced and higher caliber teams. During the decade, Gonzaga won ten straight PRU championships, five Mid-Atlantic Rugby Football Union (MARFU) championships, and two Mid-Atlantic Varsity Rugby Conference Championships. Gonzaga also played in six national championships.

The 2010s - Growing into a National Power

During this time, the program continued to expand, introducing a freshman team and eventually growing to include more than 200 players. This provided an opportunity for many more players to gain experience and playing time. The tradition of the spring break tours continued with tours to Argentina, Uruguay, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. In 2012, Gonzaga became the first American team to play in the annual Portugal International Rugby Festival; in 2013, Gonzaga played the Uruguayan National U-17 team; and in 2014, Gonzaga took on Capitolina, the defending Italian champions at the time.

In 2010, Gonzaga began sponsoring the annual Jesuit Rugby Classic, which raises funds for the Washington Jesuit Academy. The JRC is the one time when all of Gonzaga's teams play together in one location, and Gonzaga's varsity team has won six consecutive Jesuit Classic titles.

In recent years, Gonzaga has won five MAVRC championships and has played in a record seven straight National Championship semi-finals, winning the program's first National Championship in 2014, and then repeating as champions again in 2015.