



## Champion prep ruggers on the run

Eric Whitaker makes a big splash with a little help from teammate Kirk Goddard, right, as Brett Good throws out his hands to rescue the ball. They're all members of the Lamorinda Rodents, the national prep championship rugby team. See story, Page 7.

By Bill Knowland/The Tribune

# Team effort nets top rugby title

*'It was a dream come true and we came together when it mattered'*

By Scott Strain  
The Tribune

LAFAYETTE — Kirk Goddard faced an awesome task. Not only did he have to play on a rugby team, but halfway through the season he had to start coaching it, too.

That's doubly tough when you're only a senior in high school and trying to direct your peers.

All of the players, with the exception of one, Eric Flon of Miramonte, are classmates at Acalanes High School. Their team is called the Lamorinda Rodents, and it is the 1984 national 17- to 18- boys' rugby champion.

The Rodents won the title re-

cently at the Polo Fields in San Francisco, defeating No. 1-seeded New York Xaviers, 6-4, and then Del Campo of Sacramento, 22-6, for the championship. Lamorinda hadn't even won its own league; Serra of San Mateo did but was disqualified for using ineligible players. The Rodents squeaked in as a wild-card entry.

"It was just an incredible experience," Goddard said about the championship. "It was a dream come true and we came together when it mattered."

For Goddard and the rest of his Acalanes teammates, the rugby title made up for what didn't happen during the Dons'

football season. They didn't win.

"During the football season we never put it together," Goddard said. "We had the talent to do well in football and we were let down that we didn't."

Success in the "minor" sport of rugby cannot totally cancel failure in the major sport of football, but the Lamorinda Rodents, in only their third year of existence, swept to a 19-3 record in the Bay Valley Conference. They finished second to Serra but got a wild-card spot when the San Mateo team was disqualified.

Steve Page was the coach for

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*'We weren't missing on our plays and we knew everything was OK. We didn't have to worry about a man not being where he was supposed to be.'*

By Bill Knowland/The Tribune

Kirk Goddard carries ball during rugby practice.

## Rugby

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most of the first part of the season, but had to leave to take his finals at St. Mary's College, where he was a student. Goddard took over and kept the team together.

"It was tough," he said. "It was hard for a lot of guys to respect me. If I wanted to get something done, they wouldn't do it. We had a hard time getting together and when the playoffs came, we didn't think we could do it."

"In the semifinal game we went into it with the attitude of 'let's have a good time.'"

And a good time was had by all: Lamorinda 6, Xavier 4. Eric Whitaker's conversion kick (2 points) after a Rodent try (4 points) won the game ("Somehow," Goddard said) for Lamorinda.

"We watched the next game between Harbor of Los Angeles and Del Campo of Sacramento and it was very physical," Goddard said. "We wanted to get out of that game."

So Lamorinda went into the title game and suddenly found themselves a team. "We came together and decided not to get down on anybody," Goddard said. "We decided to move the forwards up, kick the ball a lot and play off the other team's mistakes."

The game was still in doubt until Lamorinda scored two quick tries just before halftime. Goodard and Brett Good scored, Whitaker kicked two conversions and Lamorinda led 18-6.

Jim Wilson scored the only try in the second half and the surprising Lamorinda Rodents were national champions, 22-6. The Rodents strategy worked — two of the tries came off of Del Campo mistakes. Lamorinda also made errors, but they didn't hurt.

"We just came together in the finals," said a still-awed Goodard. "We weren't missing on our plays and we knew everything was OK. We didn't have to worry about a man not being there he was supposed to be."

If there was one thing missing, it was the presence of team founder Pat Vincent, who had formed the team three years ago. Vincent, the former St. Mary's College rugby coach, had died of a heart attack last spring.

He was remembered by the Rodents, who wore black patches on their jerseys with the initials PBV (Pat Bernard Vincent) on them.

"Three years ago he got us together," Goddard said. "All he wanted was to form a high school rugby team. When we started, we were a practice team, not in any league. We scheduled 10 games with any teams in the Bay Area who would play us."

"Most of the teams played football, I was one of the heavier guys, and I played tackle and linebacker. I just wanted to try rugby. I knew I could carry the ball in this game. Last year, we were afraid of getting hurt playing rugby, but this year we were all seniors and we thought, 'Why not go all out?'"

Lamorinda did, and the national title was the result. The rugby experience has influenced the collegiate choices of some of the team members. Goodard and teammate Gordon Young will attend St. Mary's. Doug Hardy will enroll at Brigham

Young University and Mike Dunke will go to the University of California. All plan to continue playing rugby, and that is the best legacy Pat Vincent could have left.

Other members of the Lamorinda Rodents are: Mike Gersper, Andy Ward, Ben Tresser, Mike Thompson, Joe Farrell, Mike Li, Chuck Templeton, Brian Studwell, and Sean Cullen.



**Acalanes team still whooping it up after capturing the national championship.**