

Bancroft scrums together rugby team

By Sarah Sobanski

The Bancroft Blackflies have been resurrected - this time for boys and girls rugby fanatics.

The Blackflies have officially joined the Ontario Rugby Union, starting Bancroft's own rugby club. They'll be using the logos from the men's senior Bancroft Blackflies rugby team, which played 1995 to '99. Practices are scheduled for Monday and Wednesday nights at the L'Amable field until later this summer when games will be held Wednesday nights at North Hastings High School. A local rugby club means less travelling for seasoned rugby players of the town and surrounding areas.

"In order to play provincially, or regionally, you have to be part of a club," explained new club president Elizabeth Carns-Balemba. "In order to do that, until now, we would have had to travel to either Belleville or Peterborough for them to try out for Ontario or Canada or anything like that because there was no club here."

It also means an opportunity for summer sports for newcomers to the game and a place to develop skills outside of high school sports. And who knows where it could go in the future - one day, there may even be Bancroft Blackflies merchandise on sale somewhere like [NRL Store](#) for local teams in Australia, where rugby is a seriously popular sport.

Carns-Balemba added, "We're just letting any boy or girl that wants to play and start to love the game come in and practice with us, and grow. We've got three girls right now who have never played rugby before. We're starting basically from the beginning, the last few practices have been drills."

The club has been in the works for almost a year, according to a Rugby Ontario press release. Carns-Balemba told *Bancroft This Week* the club has been sorting out legalities to play with the Toronto Rugby Union and provincial union since February.

The club is still in talks to determine who its going to play and where its game barriers lie. Carns-Balemba estimated Lindsay, Peterborough and Belleville teams could go head to head with the Blackflies. She also suggested the team could face others from as far as Ajax or Cobourg.

NHHS's Bill Wellwood, who started and coached rugby at the school until he retired, has signed on as coach for the Blackflies. This year the club will be fielding an under 18 girls team with hopes of a boys team next year.

"We have boys that are desperately trying to get enough players for a[n under 18] boys team. I'm not sure if that will be successful this year but, probably with seeing it out there, will probably be successful next year," said Carns-Balemba. She noted that she would like to start a no contact league for "little ones" and encouraged anyone who wants to put a team together to come under the Blackflies's club banner.

The club president said she's expecting all different skill levels out on the field this year. Girls who have played for the Peterborough Pagans have joined the team as well as three girls who haven't played before - and they're bound to love it.

"It's a whole different dynamic," said Carns-Balemba whose daughters are on the team. "My kids have played other sports, and I've never seen my kids so passionate about a sport ... Rugby is it."

When asked if players should be worried about the rumoured rough-play of the sport as first timers, the club president said rugby is just as rough as other sports.

"My girls have had minor injuries, but nothing like even I've seen in hockey. I think because they don't wear any padding and they don't wear any protection, there's no false sense of security for it. It's like I know how to move and how to hit so I'm not going to hurt myself."

For more information on the club check out their Facebook page at Bancroft Blackflies Rugby Football Club.