

Blood and heart become rugby

By Joseph Midkiff
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The Player

Alan "Chief" Thompson, a senior exercise science major of Conway, is a pillar of the Arkansas State University Rugby Club. Although rugby has been a part of his life for only four years, Thompson has developed into a strong physical and mental threat to anyone who opposes him on the field.

Thompson is versatile in the specialty positions. His title is "hooker" but he can also play "prop", both "loose head" and "tight head." These positions are on either side of the "hooker."

Thompson has always been passionate about being involved with sports.

"It is good for your mind and body to be involved in sports," Thompson said. He participated in hockey at Vilonia High School.

During the past four years of play, Thompson has received several prestigious awards.

He made the Midsouth All-Star Team in 1999 and 2001 and the All-South All-Star Team in 2000. Coaches choose the recipients of the All-Star awards.

Thompson's life is as fast paced as the sport he loves. He works two jobs and also is involved with an internship.

He estimates that he puts in 70 to 80 hours a week between work and school. "I go from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. before I have any time for myself," Thompson said.

The Coach

"The person on our team that sacrifices more than anybody else is coach Huckabee," Thompson said. Curtis Huckabee, a local lawyer, has coached the rugby team for the last five years.

Huckabee stresses the importance of school to the players and tells them that it is not the most important part of school.

"He's just like a dad to us," Thompson said.

"He's a good man and a good coach," Thompson said. "I don't know that I would want to play for any other coach in the country besides Curt Huckabee."

"He tells us at practice, 'If you have the heart, but don't have the legs to carry it, it doesn't matter,'"

Thompson said. "He does and he has carried us. I hope we can carry him to the next National Championship."

Throughout the year, Huckabee reminds his players what their goal is, to win the National Championship.

"We can do it. We have the ability and the skills. We have all the tools. We just have to put them all together," Thompson said.

The Team

The team won the National Championship in 2000. The team competed for the championship again in 2001, but lost to Baylor.

"They just outplayed us. They were a better team that day but on another day, we could have played them better," Thompson said. "I would love to play them again!"

Baylor has moved to Division I and will not play the Division II ASU team again.

At the time of the championship game, Baylor was the only Division II team ASU had ever lost to. ASU has been recognized as a USA Rugby Team for the past five years.

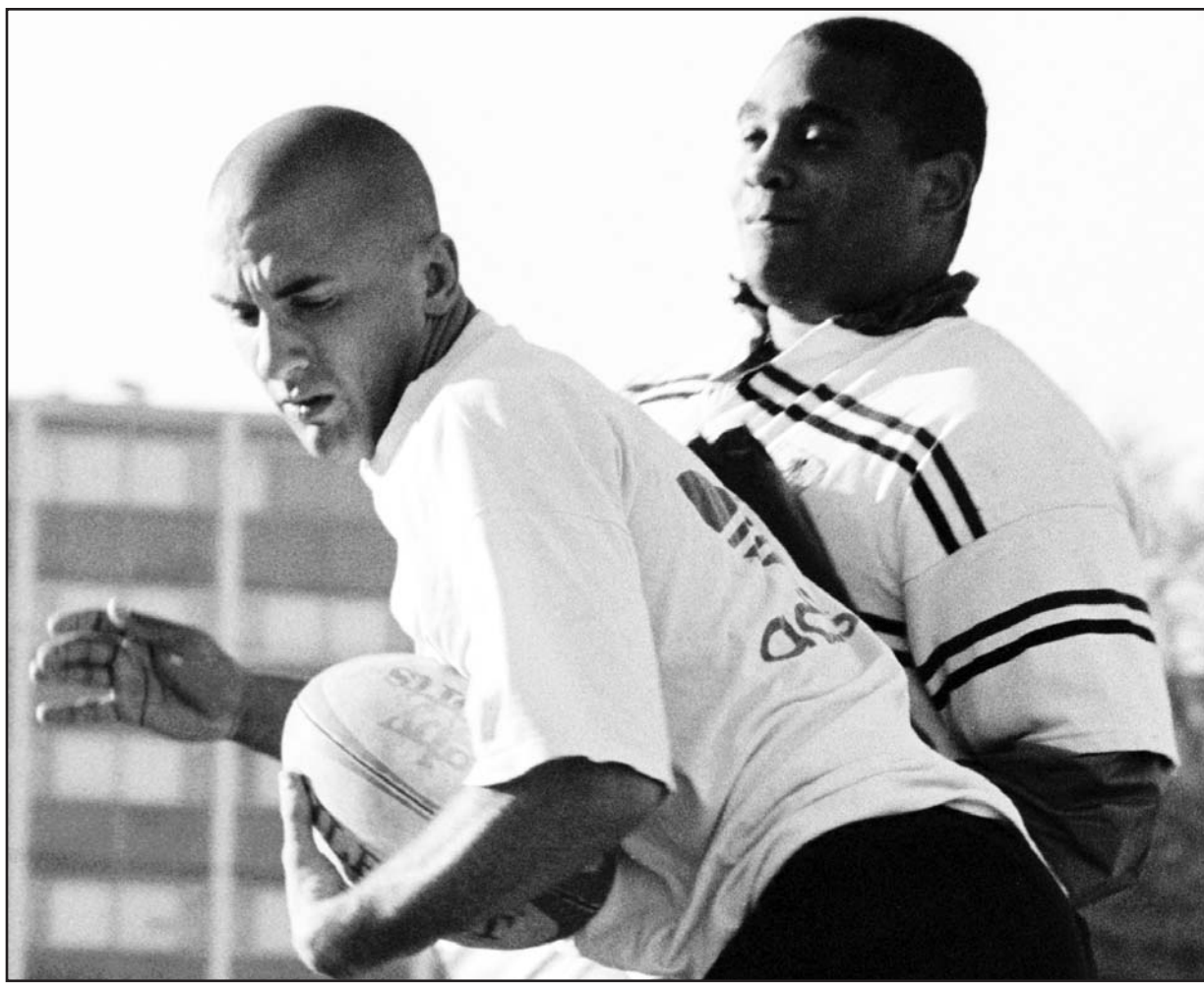
Rugby and pain complement one another.

"The injury rate in this sport is like Russian roulette. You can't play the sport and not get hurt,"

Thompson said. "Every game you are putting the bullet in the gun, pulling the trigger, and hoping it doesn't go off."

The players can't afford to lose any one of their teammates to injury. They only have about 25 eligible players. "The only thing we can do is try to minimize the injuries that occur," Thompson said. There is a player on the team that has been playing for two years without an ACL—a ligament in the knee.

"The year we won the National Championship, I played with both of my feet broken. Right now I'm playing with a broken foot," Thompson said. "It hurts and it hurts to play. I



Joey Steele and Croix Thompson practice a rugby drill last Thursday afternoon in preparation for last weekend's game against Middle Tennessee State. ASU lost its first game of the season against the Division I university, 13-0.

can't turn my head all the way to either side now. I've shrunk almost two inches because of the compressed weight of the other guys on my body," Thompson said.

"I know that a lot of people think we are just nuts. But this game is for the most pure athlete," Thompson said. "There is nothing like it!"

Rugby is the combination of the player's speed, power, agility and endurance. The endurance is the most important. There are no time-outs or substitutions during the game. If a player leaves the game, even if it is because of the result of an injury, they cannot go back in. The games last

for 80 minutes and the field is 140 by 70 meters.

"You have to have the endurance of a soccer player but you also have to be able to hit and take hits like a football player," Thompson said. The athletes play both offense and defense.

The intensity level must stay high for the entire game. The last five minutes of the game is as important as the first five. If a team scores then

that team gets the ball back. The game's pace can change very quickly.

The schedule is grueling. The players are involved around 20 to 25 games a semester. They have both fall and spring seasons and there is even a summer season. The summer season is for those who want to stay around and play in a few tournaments.

"We sacrifice so much just to play. At any given time, if we decide that we don't want to do it any more, then we can quit. It's not like we are having to worry about our scholarships. We don't get them," Thompson said. "There are guys in other sports that play because they have a scholarship and they can go to school on it."

"The reason we are such a good team is because we play because we

want to," Thompson said.

The team's record for this season is 3-1. They received their first loss, 13-0, this past weekend to Division I Middle Tennessee State.

ASU will be hosting the National Elite Eight April 20-21.

"It's the big dance. This is the road to the National Championship, right here in Jonesboro," Thompson said. "We have already won the conference and our first step to the National Championship."

There will be teams from all over the country visiting ASU. It will be televised on ESPN. "If you are in rugby, this is it, you are going to be here," Thompson said.

There will be a home game, March 9, against the University of Tennessee. On March 23-24, the team will travel to Myrtle Beach for the South Tournament.

ASU basketball comes to an end this weekend

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The men and women finished the 2001-2002 basketball season this weekend without a conference title.

The women lost in a close game the first round.

The men started the first round strong but fizzled out in the second game.

UNO 51 ASU 47

The women were stopped early in the tournament. They lost to New Orleans 51-47 in overtime Friday night.

Junior forward Jolie McKeirman led the Tribe with 19 points. Senior guard Rae-Anne Smith followed with 12 points and senior center Chiquita Tucker finished with 9 points.

ASU shot only 30.2 percent and UNO did even worse with 27.6.

The Lady Indians finished the season 12-16.

This was ASU's first losing season since the 1989-90 season.

La.-Lafayette 74 ASU 59

After an exciting win Friday night against Denver, 58-53, the Indians finished with a sobering loss to La. Lafayette, 74-59, Saturday night.

Senior center Jason Jennings finished with 12 points and only two blocked shots.

Senior guard Nick Rivers also had 12 points after a game high of 20 points against Denver.

Senior forward Kolin Weaver followed with 9 points.

Sophomore forward Kim Adams had a game high of 13 rebounds.

The men finished the season 15-16.

SGA 2002

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