

Running Head: MEDIA AND SPORTS SPECTACLE

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*TV Coverage of Rugby in the U.S.A.*

*Marta Fonseca Tartar*

Thesis for the

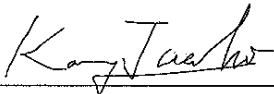
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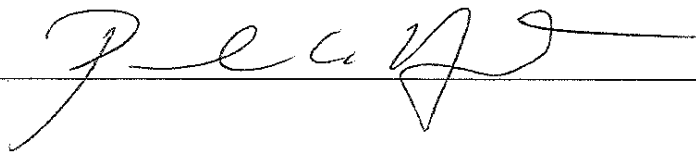
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## Abstract

This project analyzes the TV coverage of rugby in the U.S., the development of the sport into a media spectacle in preparation for the 2016 Olympics, and highlights the importance of TV coverage in stimulating growth and expansion of a sport and granting it mainstream status. The transformation of rugby into media spectacle was primarily observed by analyzing the results of a survey posted online and sent to rugby fans throughout the U.S., particularly participants' feelings on rugby TV coverage, rugby access, and general exposure to the sport. The overall perception of rugby TV coverage in the U.S. is very poor, while access to games remains limited. And though some networks are demonstrating real interest in rugby, namely due to its Olympic re-inclusion, they have yet to implement the right packaging to present rugby as a sports spectacle. Survey responses show, however, that existing fans are generally satisfied with the current rugby television format's ability to portray several angles and share-ability of the experience with friends and family. Ultimately, television coverage will be the key to spreading the game to new fans and future athletes, but serious improvement are still needed in promoting game schedules, beefing up broadcast commentary, and ensuring that the sport is accessible at the right time and on the right channel.

Keywords: sports media, rugby, sports spectacle, TV coverage, media exposure, Olympics

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## Introduction

In the United States, sports represent a very unique commodity — experienced by a few on the playing field and by many more through the media. Sports can also be a hobby, a profession, and a vocation. The challenge for sports advocates is to figure out how certain sports can break through and thrive in the U.S.'s over-saturated market, competing with national sports giants like football, basketball and baseball. As the primary vehicle for broadcasting sports to fans and athletes all over the world, the media serves an essential function in the development of any new sport and the building a solid fan base. Despite the following and ground support behind a sport, media exposure can determine its survival or demise.

The sport of rugby union (rugby) has deep historical roots in the U.S., having started in England in 1823 and subsequently imported to the U.S. around the late 1870s (Trueman, n.a., *Origins of Rugby* and Donnelly, P., & Young, K. M., 1985) (See Appendix VI). In the first few years of the 20th century, the rules of rugby were modified into the game of American football, even as rugby in its original form continued to be played at the college and adult club level around the country. From 1900 to 1924, rugby was included as an Olympic sport four times, with the U.S. team taking the gold in 1920 and 1924 (Olympic.org, n.a.). Due to aggressive fans and country tensions, however, the International Olympic Committee deemed rugby unfit to continue in the Olympics. Since then, rugby developed independently around the world, enjoyed much success in certain countries, such as New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, and France. In the meantime, rugby virtually disappeared from the public eye and lost all major support in the U.S.

According to general economic trends for the media market, the value of a product — in this case a sport — comes from the perceived value it holds. For the most part, rugby has been associated with English culture and a violent fan-base. Similarly, the sport has been characterized by hard hits, aggressive plays, and drunken mischief. This reputation and the late onset and few broadcasts of rugby in the U.S., including its exclusion from the Olympics for almost a century, have made it relatively difficult for people in the U.S. to get to know the sport and follow it as fans. Over the past forty years, organizations including U.S. rugby's National Governing Body, USA Rugby, and grassroots groups dedicated to rugby have been working to convince U.S. athletes and fans to warm up to this "foreign" sport and to recognize its potential as a superior spectacle in the U.S.

The slow pace of growth of the rugby fan base in the U.S. is partially due to the major

networks' slow-adaptation and hesitation in broadcasting and providing visibility to the sport. A few media corporations have shown an interest in showcasing the sport on TV, namely NBC, which has taken a key early position in covering U.S. rugby since 2011, the first year rugby was broadcast live on network television. True, the past five years have seen an unprecedented increase in U.S. rugby coverage from practically nothing, but the U.S. still lags far behind in regards rugby spectator development (See Appendix VI). Unless the major networks become fully convinced of the profitability of broadcasting rugby on TV, it will remain a niche sport in the U.S. and will be unable to reach mainstream status. The concept of media spectacle as the commodification of a mediated experience may be the solution to increasing rugby's popularity and accessibility in the U.S.

This thesis looks at how the evolution in TV coverage of rugby in the U.S. and the adoption of the played sport informs the state of rugby as sports spectacle in this country. By evaluating the level of TV coverage of rugby in the U.S. and the adoption of the played sport in the recent past, I show that in a media-obsessed nation like the U.S., rugby needs greater media exposure in order to get on the radar of the sports community, which will help put it on an equal playing field with other media sports. While I don't claim to provide any one concrete plan for setting up more rugby coverage, my aim is to provide an analysis of the past and current status of rugby TV coverage in the U.S. The importance of this research lies in the fact that TV coverage is essential to embedding rugby into the U.S. sports culture. Since media — TV in particular — is one of the main methods for stimulating growth and expansion of a sport, it is important to understand the motivations of the media in investing or not.

In conducting my research on media exposure of U.S. rugby, I found that there was a significant period of dormancy throughout the 20th century, whereas in the last 10 or so years, there has been a definite surge in TV coverage of the sport. In order to find out how the change in TV coverage of rugby in the U.S. and the adoption of the played sport informs the state of rugby in this country, my research methods involved a substantial amount of quantitative data gathering and analysis, along with qualitative interviews and survey evaluations. My research also served to identify why the major TV networks have been so hesitant to broadcast the sport. In the end, the data I gathered convincingly illustrates the story of rugby's past and potential future in the U.S. Since that future depends on rugby seeming like a profitable

investment, I also looked into strategies and campaigns in place to rebrand through technology and compelling stories.

In terms of quantitative research, I sought audience measurement data from TV networks that have broadcast rugby in the U.S. Since most of the broadcasts were by private cable channels, much of this information is not publicly available although I was able to model some viewership trends using data provided by NBC and NBC Sports Network.

With the help of USA Rugby, I acquired metrics on the adoption of the played sport in this country over the past few years, to gauge the growth of the rugby player and fan base in the U.S. I found trends that indicate an increase in programming and viewership of rugby in the U.S., which translates to an increased support of the sport in this country, in terms of media contracts and public participation through memberships.

To supplement this statistical analysis, I created and sent out a survey to gather historical and personal narratives relating to TV coverage of rugby in the U.S. (See Appendix III). Through my personal contacts, and these individuals' extended network, my sample of 500 respondents represents the largest surveyed group of rugby fans and players in the U.S. Since this research is being performed as a case study, I did not expect to reach every last rugby fan, but I did get responses from a diverse range of people all over the nation. The survey questions were posed in various formats — as rankings, yes/no questions, multiple choice, etc. — in order to elicit some straightforward answers for quantitative analysis, along with more subjective perspectives for the qualitative portion of the research.

Lastly, I conducted a few personal interviews to supplement the quantitative data gathered. On the rugby side of things, I spoke with the CEO of USA Rugby, Nigel Melville, and the president of USA Sevens, Jonathan First. Along with speaking with other prominent rugby professionals, these conversations gave me a comprehensive overview of U.S. rugby's relationship with media, the obstacles they have overcome and the struggles they still face. In terms of media coverage, I conducted a phone interview with Gary Quinn, vice president of Programming & Owned Properties at The NBC Sports Group. This conversation gave some insight into the organizational and structural happenings behind the promotion and investment of rugby by the media, namely NBC Sports as a leader in this field.

On a personal note, my first introduction to rugby was at 18 years old, during my freshman year in college, when I followed my roommate to a team try-out for this sport I had



heard absolutely nothing about. After one practice, I was captivated; I fell in love with the sport, the team, and everything it represents. From that day on, I have become more and more involved with anything and everything rugby-related; all the while seeking to pass on my passion to anyone I meet. I truly believe the future of the sport lies in youth development and exposing the newer generations to the benefits of learning and playing rugby from an early age. This exposure can happen by word of mouth but the more effective way would be to take advantage of the existing media outlets that regulate our lives and get more rugby on TV among other platforms. That way, no one will be able to go off to college and say, like I did, that they don't know what rugby is.

For a comprehensive view rugby in the U.S., we must first understand the roots and origins of the game, where it is positioned in the American sports industry today, the dynamics between sports and media in general, and in particular the amount and quality of media coverage and TV broadcasts rugby has received. In addition to this contextual understanding, theory and literature can be useful in looking to the future, in this case studying Olympic media and the significance of rugby 7s' return to the Olympics in 2016.

As a result of this future event, Rugby is set to undergo some significant changes at the local, national and international level in the coming years. After much support from the community and a serious lobbying effort, rugby was once again voted back into the Olympics at a 2009 conference and will make its re-debut at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Because of its inclusion in the biggest global media spectacle in the world, rugby will most likely benefit from greater acceptance and legitimacy. And with media at the forefront of promoting and publicizing the sport globally, it will be interesting to see how the U.S. sports-viewing audience reacts and receives rugby.

There is still room for rugby to be incorporated into the U.S. sporting culture; it just has to be presented and packaged effectively — as the ultimate spectator sport — targeting the right audience at the right time. This paper explores = ways that that can be done.

## **I. RUGBY AND SPORTS SPECTACLE**

### **History of Rugby**

Nigel Trueman (n.a.) is one of the leading rugby historians around and has recorded the evolution of rugby union on his site RugbyFootballHistory.Com. In “Origins of Rugby”, Trueman (n.a.) writes that rugby, since its inception in 1823 in England, has spread and evolved all over the world, establishing itself as a prominent sport in its two main forms: 15s and 7s. Unlike many sports, which uniquely require height or speed above other qualities, rugby requires a combination of skills and can generally be called a sport for all shapes and sizes. In the beginning of the 20th century, Baron Pierre de Coubertin became president of the International Olympic Committee and helped launch the modern Olympics. Interestingly enough, he himself was a rugby player and held a high regard for the sport, as quoted by the International Rugby Board (IRB) (2012) in "A golden past: Rugby at the Olympics":

What is admirable in football (Rugby), is the perpetual mix of individualism and discipline, the necessity for each man to think, anticipate, take a decision and at the same time subordinate one's reasoning, thoughts and decisions to those of the captain. And even the referee's whistle stopping a player for a 'fault' one team mate has made and he hasn't seen, tests his character and patience. For all that, football is truly the reflection of life, a lesson experimenting in the real world.

Rugby soon began spreading around the world, as a reporter for *Forbes.com*'s SportsMoney section, Jon Pritchett (2011), discusses in the article "Why Pro Rugby Could Win In The United States": "As a result of English imperialism, the sport was spread to the southern hemisphere and those countries (Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa) have come to dominate in international competitions." Meanwhile, in the U.S. rugby evolved into modern American football, whose it's modifications have set it apart very abruptly, starting around 1906 when the forward pass was first allowed (Vogel, 2011, p. 451). It has been said that rugby is American football's father much like cricket is baseball's father. However, because of the connection to English colonialism in the U.S., these sports (rugby and cricket) were simply not integrated into the sports industry but rather replaced by their Americanized forms.

Brought over to the U.S. in the late 1870s, rugby enjoyed some initial popularity and success, especially on the West Coast. The U.S. national rugby teams that were gold medal champions in the 1920 and 1924 Olympics, the last two where rugby was featured as an Olympic sport, were comprised mostly of California students, according to USA Rugby (2012) press release "USA Olympic Rugby Teams Inducted into IRB Hall of Fame." Rugby suffered a quick

demise after the French hatred towards the American rugby team and fans manifested itself through fights and verbal abuse in the stands, as Steve McMorran's (2011) chronicles in his article "At Rio in 2016, U.S. the defending champs". Due to aggressive fans and country tensions, the International Olympic Committee deemed rugby unfit to continue in the Olympics. Since then, rugby virtually disappeared from the American public eye.

### **Rugby in the U.S.**

The subtitle of USA Rugby's blog is indicative of the struggle to change the status of the sport in this country: "USA Rugby's Dream: To Inspire America to Fall in Love with Rugby." The issue isn't whether rugby has the potential to be popular — it is one of the fastest-growing sports in America, according to the 2010 review by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (Rugby World, 2011) — but how to get there. In the "Economic Impact Report on Global Rugby Part III: Strategic and Emerging Markets", Dr. Simon Chadwick et al. (2010) state that "there has been a 350% increase in rugby participation in the USA since 2004, but it is still thought of as a niche, amateur sport" (p. 4). According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association Single Sport Report Rugby 2011 (unpublished), as of 2010 there were 1.13 million projected rugby participants in the U.S., representing an 83.1% increase from 2007's 617,000 participants (See Appendix I). To put these numbers into further perspective, Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association published the "2012 Sports, Fitness and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report" listing numbers for team sports like soccer and basketball in the tens of millions (See Appendix I). This might not even be the best demonstration of the core audience in the U.S. that currently engages in and follows the sport on a regular basis since it reflects anyone who has been involved with rugby even minimally. Rugby surely has a long way to go to catch up.

The year 1975 brought about the creation of the national governing body, USA Rugby, which was the first step in reviving the sport in the country, as commented upon by Sarah Holt (2006) of BBC Sport in "Rugby reborn in the USA". Since being in office, the CEO of USA Rugby, Nigel Melville, has made it his mission to revive "a sport that has smouldered on the edges of the U.S. sporting consciousness for the best part of a century" (Holt, 2006). For the most part, beginning in the 1960s, U.S. rugby thrived at the college level, and only recently have there been serious efforts to invest in the youth and professional levels to provide pathways for

players to excel and improve. Membership data collected by USA Rugby for rugby teams shows a steady increase, namely at the high school, college and senior level (See Appendix II). These membership numbers provide a surer measure of rugby participation in the U.S. and are useful for correlating exposure and adoption of a sport, either through playing, coaching, refereeing or administration.

With 1.13 million projected participants in 2010, and 112,739 registered USA Rugby members in 2012, the 500 participants to the survey I sent out might seem insignificant. Yet given the representation from all six regions of the U.S. — Northwest, Southwest, Midwest, Southcentral, Northeast, and Southeast — this data can be extrapolated to explain the situation on a whole, providing a projected overview of the rugby landscape in the U.S. (See Appendix IV). Since my personal network originates in the Northeast, it isn't surprising that this region had the most representatives responding. Yet a clear shortage of participants in the Southern regions hints at a weaker rugby presence and a smaller rugby community. In fact, a great part of the U.S. rugby fan base consists of ex-patriots from rugby nations such as England, Scotland and Australia. These people, when migrating to the U.S., generally settle down in metropolitan areas on the East Coast around cities like New York, DC and Boston or on the West Coast around LA.

Of this survey sample of 500, the largest group of active participants fell in the 16-25age range, followed closely by the 26-35 age range (See Appendix IV). This directly relates to the membership growth we see at the high school and college level. Meanwhile, 38% of survey participants consider themselves rugby fans from the last five years, with 28% claiming to be rugby fans for over 20 years. This combination of recent and established interest can be extremely beneficial in working on future plans for developing the sport, working off of the knowledge of historical efforts on the matter. Likewise, this gap in participants' experience reflects the surge in rugby involvement in the 60's and then the renewed attention it has received in the past few years. Even though most respondents classified themselves as wearing several rugby "hats", the majority put themselves under the "Player" and "Fan" categories, with 76% and 79% respectively. This classification isn't surprising since players will obviously want to see their sport televised and given attention, giving them a chance to watch themselves. The challenge remains in attracting new fans, appealing to parents of players, and reaching the massive untapped market of sports fans in the U.S. The analysis of this data will provide important distinctions and markers when discussing media investments in rugby.

The three current major sports giants in the U.S. are American football, baseball and basketball, listed by Michaela Conley (1979) in the *Media & Values* journal piece "Sports: Is It Just 'Entertainment'?" (See Appendix I). Few other sports, such as hockey and NASCAR racing, have managed to reach a significant amount of recognition when competing with these massive sports enterprises. Yet because of its association with English colonialism, rugby was never sold as an "American" sport and consequently never became an integral part of generational traditions. Nigel Trueman (n.a.) extensively documents the history of rugby with recaps like "Rugby at the Olympics" when the 1924 Olympic rugby final between the U.S. and French teams resulted in violent riots. This behavior tainted the sport and created a direct association with a violent fan-base and aggressive, crude culture. Timothy Chandler (1999) addresses rugby's reputation in his essay "Recognition through Resistance: Rugby in the U.S.A.": "It is clear that rugby's organizing bodies in the United States did perceive that there was an 'image problem' and as such there was increasing pressure to 'clean up' the image of the game off the field from the late 1970s onwards" (p. 58). Over the past forty or so years, rugby leaders and supporters have been fighting to convince athletes and fans to warm up to this "foreign" sport and to give it a try, or at least to watch a game or two on TV before making quick judgments.

The challenge is making rugby accessible to new fans and athletes in the U.S. who are simply unfamiliar with the sport. In the commentary "Rugby's Olympic return in sight", Scott Barboza (2012) of ESPN Boston quotes Alex Magleby, the current head coach of the U.S. national men's 7s team: "We're a country of 300 million-plus people and we produce athletes with a far-ranging base of skills. We just have to expose them to the sport." Tom Dart (2012) of *The Guardian* seems to believe that a solution is fast approaching: "Are Americans warming up to rugby? Why it may be the sport's time to shine." He quotes Melville's strategy and optimism: "We think it can be designed in the shape of an American sport, with conferences, the way it's televised. You have to appeal to what they understand, but explain to them, this is also around the world" (Dart, 2012). When compared to other rugby-playing nations, it isn't surprising that the U.S. is trailing behind. These rugby-playing nations created and maintained continuously evolving strategies to develop rugby's reach and appeal, while the U.S. saw random spurts of growth and success, namely winning the gold at the Olympics in 1924, followed by a general lack of organization resulting in stunted growth until the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

One element of the resistance to rugby, and a residual of this negative image associated

with rugby, is the safety concern surrounding rugby athletes. Although associations with football may lead to a blurring of the distinction between the two sports, it can help in enforcing the safety measures at play in rugby. Patrick Guthrie (personal communication, November 9, 2012), a seasoned rugby media specialist and co-author of *Rugby for Dummies*, emphasizes that a new and improved rugby image should focus on the controllable elements of coaching safety in contact situations. By defining rugby as a game about possession, continuity and slow buildup, it distinguishes itself from football's objectives of stopping play with hard hits lacking any real limitations. Guthrie (personal communication, November 9, 2012) believes the main distinction that will help sell rugby is that contact is taken on the player's own terms, both in offense and defense, whereas in football you don't know when you're going to be hit. The safety measures in place result in a lower incidence of concussions and collision-related injuries than sports like football and even soccer. The Province blog published the article "Diary of an Immigrant" by Juliet Sullivan (2013) providing a first-hand account of a rugby mother's take on the sport: "It's our instinct as women to be protective, and our instinct as parents to be scared if we perceive our kids to be in danger. The fact is, rugby is no more dangerous than other sports... We need to educate people about the benefits of kids getting involved in the sport; we need to show that it is a great game and that it is not dangerous, as it is perceived to be." Yes, rugby players do not wear helmets or pads, and the only protective gear they carry is a mouth guard (sometimes a scrumcap, too), but the rules and laws of the game are put in place to minimize injuries and to maximize safe play and a fair game — such as tackles below the waist, wrapping around the knees, and falling down with the tackled player.

Once more, rugby in a sense suffers from constant associations with football. However, there is a historical and undeniable link between the two sports that may help in attracting new athletes. Holt (2006) quotes USA Rugby's Chairman, Kevin Roberts, on his plan for using this link to the organization's advantage: "Many top college players fail to make it into the NFL, and some may be tempted to switch sports." Just like football, rugby is a team contact sport. But more than that, rugby is being sold in the U.S. as a perfect amalgamation of the various national sports or as USA Rugby puts it a mix of "the ferocity of hockey, the speed and toughness of football, the high jumping of basketball, the precision sliding of baseball and the inventiveness and artistry of soccer" (Pritchett, 2011). It does not pretend to be superior to these sports, but rather an alternative, an option for those athletes looking for a different athletic pursuit. Like

many rugby backers, Melville (personal communication, February 22, 2012) confirms one of the greatest appeals of the sport: "The thing with rugby is that we don't exclude. We don't push people away from our sport; we embrace them, no matter who they are. And that's something that a lot of sports don't do.... there's a place for everybody. And that's pretty unique for a lot of sports, particularly in America." Focusing on new and unique characteristics in this way is necessary when competing with rooted sports giants in an already oversaturated sports industry.

Peter Donnelly and Kevin Young (1985), authors of "Reproduction and Transformation of Cultural Forms in Sport: A Contextual Analysis of Rugby", proposed "the game provided the perfect countercultural alternative for those who enjoyed the contact and action of football but wished to distance themselves from the ideological overtones. In other words, the adoption of Rugby is seen as a form of resistance to the dominant sport culture in North America, and particularly as that culture is expressed in football" (p. 30). Yet football and rugby can and should coexist and benefit tremendously from each other, given that one has a national professional league and the other has an Olympic pathway. It comes down to the athlete and them being aware of the sports choices available as well as the package that follows, in terms of values and branding associated with each activity.

The growth of the sport — labeled a "sleeping giant" — in the U.S. is followed in its many stages, from youth, to high school, to college and beyond in director Sylvain Doreau's (2009) documentary *A Giant Awakens: The Rise of American Rugby* (BIN15 Productions, 2009). The film touches on the aforementioned idea of attracting "crossover athletes" who aren't entirely satisfied with their position in mainstream U.S. sports (BIN15 Productions, 2009). This transition is already happening in a few cases, for example when former Brown University linebacker, Miles Craigwell, felt the pull of rugby: "I called up my agent right there and said 'I'm watching rugby on TV, collegiate sevens. Get in touch with whoever you need to so I can play this sport'" (McMorran, 2011). In the same spirit, Rodger Sherman (2013) of SB Nation picked up the story "Maurice Claret wants to play Rugby in 2016 Olympics" in which former Ohio State running back Claret, has traded in NFL dreams for a shot at Olympic rugby.

Magleby, the national 7s coach preparing for the Olympics, explains the uniqueness of rugby as a sport: "In rugby, every player on the field holds the ball at some stage. It engages every player on the field. You have to make decisions with the ball, whether you pass it, run with it, and everybody has to move up and down the field with the game line. There's no hiding,

everybody has to participate” (Barboza, 2012). This degree of player inclusivity attracts athletes who appreciate a challenge and welcome multiple responsibilities. By targeting current athletes involved in contact sports, rugby can secure an interested group for recruitment, if not to play, then to support the sport in other ways. There is certainly not a shortage of athletes in America; the hope is that rugby can make its way to the front of the list of chosen sports for athletes all over the U.S.

Until recently, a major obstacle to rugby’s adoption lay in the uncertain future that a rugby athlete faced: “In the states, every single kid who plays sport, their parents know what the endgame is. It could be a college scholarship, a pro contract, an Olympian... [Rugby wasn't] offering any of those” (Dart, 2012). Now that it’s returning as an Olympic sport in 2016, rugby finally has established all the steps necessary for a young athlete to develop and find success, though a lot remains to be done to elevate rugby to the professional athletic level it inhabits in other parts of the world. In countries where rugby thrives, paid rugby players reach the level of national legends, such as Waisale Serevi from Fiji, arguably the most talented rugby 7s player in history, and Jonah Lomu from the New Zealand All Blacks, undeniably the greatest rugby superstar around. In *Rugby Union and Globalization: An Odd-Shaped World*, John Harris (2010) discusses how sports legends are created in the context of rugby: “An athlete's celebrity stems not just from any discernible achievements in their chosen sport but through much broader cultural and economic processes... rugby's failure to develop the game beyond a narrow collection of nations means that the sport has little social currency in a number of places beyond this group” (p. 58). These legends’ names mean nothing in nations that haven’t adopted rugby. Jon First (personal communication, November 27, 2012), president of USA Sevens, recognizes the importance of creating local legends: “Stars and heroes. That’s the name of the game in sports.” Until the U.S. raises an American rugby superstar of its own, able to compete with the likes of Serevi and Lomu, rugby won’t have that needed “social currency”.

To encourage such efforts, rugby experts like Guthrie are leading significant projects to launch a North American Professional Rugby league, operating on the belief that professional rugby is the catalyst necessary for change in the U.S. Analyzing the success of the sport in accomplished rugby nations like New Zealand, South Africa and Australia leads to the conclusion that developing professional rugby entities increases the sport’s currency in the eyes of the audience and the market in general. According to Guthrie (personal communication,



November 9, 2012), at this point in time, with a significant increase in demand for rugby media content, rugby is in a prime position to launch a professional operation in the U.S. Higher-up officials are of the same mind, recognizing the significance of building up the professional game at the same time as the grassroots level. Melville (personal communication, February 22, 2012) explains that USA Rugby has “a double-pronged attack ... the key interest of our elite programs, is that the elite is the opportunity in terms of broadcast.” With an official professional association following international models of similar leagues, media will be more inclined to show an interest in broadcasting the sport.

For the moment, the U.S. is classified as a developing rugby nation, and “without major TV coverage of the sport, rugby in America may never find the popularity it enjoys overseas” (BIN15 Productions, 2009). A sport needs publicity to thrive, as affirmed by Curtis Reed (2011) in his *This Is American Rugby* blog post “The U.S. hosting the 2012 JWRT [Junior World Rugby Trophy]: Why It Needs To Happen”: “Exposure to the sport on TV leads to goals. Young athletes see the Olympics on TV, they want to win a medal... Exposure leads to aspirations and goals for younger players.” Remembering USA Rugby’s double-pronged strategy, injecting a passion for rugby at the youth level while presenting it as an elite spectacle is a likely recipe for rugby to prosper in the U.S.

## II. TV AND THE MEDIA SPECTACLE

### TV and Sports

According to Jim Murray (1986) in “The Man Who Invented TV Sports”, Boone Arledge, known for his stint as president of ABC Sports, was the first person to recognize the potential sports held for media coverage, turning games into more than just physical tests, and presenting them as entertainment events. Before media coverage, sports were only enjoyed by the athletes playing and the fans in attendance. In the U.S., televised sports began around 1939 with the network NBC first broadcasting baseball and American football (Whannel, 2009, p. 208) (See Appendix VI). Conley (1979) expands on the argument that sports can be seen as a sort of show business: “Sports draw the largest audiences of any type of programming, have expanded to fill more time in the schedule and command some of the best technical performances by camera crews and technicians in the medium.” In an interesting turn of events,

TV coverage began to surpass the real-life experience of sports due to the ability to capture close-ups, to broadcast slowed down replays, and to provide multiple views of the game (Whannel, 2009, p. 209). Nowadays, TV broadcasts of games are often cheaper, more accessible, and sometimes even more comfortable and enjoyable than going to watch the real thing.

Over the years, TV solidified its position as the primary vehicle for transmitting sports to a wide audience. In the post "If You Pay For Cable, You're A Hostage Of Sports", NPR's sports commentator Frank Deford (2012) summarizes the vital relationship between sports and TV coverage: "You see, games are about the last thing scheduled live on television: not edited for time; not taped news packages; not delayed by time zone." Radio and print are media that transmit only a few aspects of the game, whereas TV manages to offer the most "live" experience, with sound, image and commentary. In WNYC's Radiolab podcast special, "Shorts: Seeing in the Dark", Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich quote the scientist and psychologist Zoltan Torey who says that: "Emotionally we do not react and cannot react properly to things we cannot visualize. The whole human organism is constructed to react to pictures." So TV manages to connect with our need for visual stimulus and as such attracts us to the images represented.

The strategic decision to use TV for greater exposure is highlighted by Joan Chandler (1988) in *TV and National Sport*: "In using TV as their primary marketing device, American sports promoters are merely reflecting one facet of U.S. public life, its domination by electronic media" (p. 111). Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes (2009), authors of *Power Play: Sport, the Media and Popular Culture*, further explain the importance of media to sports coverage: "The economic and regulatory environment in which television finds itself helps to shape the nature and character of the programmes it broadcasts. It also dictates what sports should be shown and how they should be presented" (p. 65). If media did not condition the majority of our life's interactions and decisions, then perhaps it wouldn't affect the way we enjoy sports. As media continues to dominate our daily routine in new ways, through digital and social media, likewise sports programmers will construct their product with these new frameworks in mind.

At its simplest, TV coverage benefits a sport by spreading it to new audiences and raising awareness of the game. In "From Sport to Cultural Consumption: Media, Capitalism, and the Transformation of Football", author Tony Schirato (2006) comments on this relationship: "television, and by extension the public relations and marketing industries, has

taken on the task of widening the sports demographic, and more specifically of promoting sport to groups who know little or nothing of the field and have cared even less. To some extent this involves selling sports to lucrative non-traditional markets” (p. 44-45). The power of TV to convince non-traditional viewers to stay tuned to a specific program can be the key to the success or failure of a product. In the collection of interviews compiled for *Those Guys Have All The Fun: Inside the World of ESPN*, James Miller and Tom Shales (2011) include a NASCAR race car driver, Jeff Burton’s testimony: “ESPN made us [NASCAR] relevant. Even back then people were looking to ESPN for things that were relevant in sports, and their coverage of our sport made the basketball fan, the football fan, and the baseball fan stop and say, ‘What is this?... So ESPN brought the sport to a lot of people who otherwise wouldn’t have paid attention” (p. 209). Like it did with NASCAR and other athletic pursuits like sailing, TV coverage can elevate a sport’s status as well as stimulate growth and expansion, but the relationship is two-way (Miller et. al, 2011). Sports represent a productive area of programming, constantly being renewed with a guaranteed audience due to the live and active nature of the content.

In *Making a Spectacle: A Case Study in TV Sports Production*, Richard Gruneau (1989) explains the dynamic that originally tied sports and TV together: “Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, sport provided television with a relatively inexpensive way to reach large audiences of males in their peak earning years. Network competition for the sale of these audiences to advertisers increased the value of ‘television rights’ to various sports and provided commercial sports organizations with a massive infusion of capital” (p. 136). The give-and-take relationship is furthered explained in Rosita Wolfe, Tony Meenaghan, and Paul O’Sullivan’s (1997) publication *Sport, media and sponsor: the shifting balance of power in the sports network*. They define the “symbiotic” relationship, writing that: “Sport has the capacity to build a media audience while, likewise, media have the capacity to confer status and build an audience for a sport” (p. 55). Even today, live sports TV coverage continues to be in high demand and entire networks have been launched purely on that basis. The Associated Press (2013) published the article “Dodgers, Time Warner strike \$7B deal” to discuss this new partnership: “The Los Angeles Dodgers formally announced a deal with Time Warner Cable on Monday to create a new TV channel that people familiar with the situation say assures the team more than \$7 billion over 25 years.” With the increasing demand for more baseball content, the Dodgers felt a media partnership was necessary to satisfy their fans. In similar moves, the Yankee Entertainment

Sports (YES) Network and the National Football League (NFL) Network started and continue to function solely on specific sports content.

### **The Media Spectacle**

Garry Whannel (2009) writes in "TV and the Transformation of Sport" that sport is "an instance when around the world millions share a live and unpredictable viewing experience" (p. 205). Sporting events and games thus become media events. The media theorist, Guy Debord (2006) outlines the elements regarding the representation of a live event in *Commodity as Spectacle*. He states the foundation for his argument: "Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation" (p. 117). Given the nature of media and the structural limits of TV coverage, televised sports events are representations of the live game. The fan watching a game on TV is receiving a mediated and enhanced version of reality. The transformation of a product into a commodity then turned into spectacle is simply an effect derived from the media dictated world in which we live. While some may argue that this detracts from the purity and genuine nature of an event, in reality our current society is already too deeply entrenched in the mediated capitalistic culture that has adopted most of our time-consuming activities, namely sports.

In line with the media spectacle theory, sports have become an exploited form of entertainment – set out for the sole purpose of keeping people engaged in the show and no other distraction: "In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself" (Debord, 2006, p. 120). The spectacle therefore is presented to the viewer as a representation of the real event and is promoted as something worth watching. In the text *Globalizing Sport: How Organizations, Corporations, Media, and Politics are Changing Sports*, George Sage (2010) explains how the spectacle distinguishes itself in the U.S.: "Broadcast sporting events are immensely popular and attract large audiences because many people are interested in the beauty and drama of sports events, which are more exciting and suspenseful than most other broadcast programming" (p. 163). In the greater scheme of things, American sports represent small victories with regional interest, yet they command so much attention. Unlike newscasts or political programs, televised sports are meant to entertain and occupy the viewer with no real greater goal. The spectacle's objective then is to captivate spectators and maintain their interest.

Meanwhile, the spectacle goes one step further in the U.S., transforming the spectator sport into something more. Americanization has almost become synonymous with commercialization and commodification – in other words turning the sports commodity into a profitable enterprise.

For some, sport will appear to be a massive triviality and in essence when the games of sport are looked at in isolate this may well be true. However, for the millions of fans around the world who invest financially and emotionally in these games, sport has always mattered. Unquestionably sport matters to big business and to those who drive the increasingly commercial and global media and entertainment industries. (Boyle et al., 2009, p. ix)

In “The (Post)Modern Olympics: Technology and the Commodification of the Olympic Movement”, Michael Real (n.a.), an expert in the area of sports spectacle, explains the term commodification as that which “reduces the value of any act or object to only its monetary exchange value, ignoring historical, artistic, or relational added values” (p. 9). In this sense, the emphasis is no longer on the pure physical talents of athletes but rather the aesthetics of the entire event surrounding a sports game, which can translate into commercial appeal. Because of the character of American culture and dependency on the spectacle and the show, sports must adapt accordingly in order to survive.

Nevertheless, critics have become concerned with the over-commercialization of sports and the negative effects that media may have on the essence of athletic ventures. In the essay “The Sports/Media Complex” from the collection *Media, Sports, & Society*, Sut Jhally (1989) touches on the dangerous nature of the intertwined relationship between sports and media: “there is an argument that because media revenues are so important to their functioning, professional sports have been *transformed* and changed, that something pure has been lost in their commercialization” (p. 80). Ultimately sacrifices are made in the negotiations between sports and media representatives. They both realize how important one is to the other and must come to the most harmless yet productive agreement possible.

Sports wouldn't have the popularity they do if athletes and fans didn't have a personal connection to them, outside of media exposure. Lawrence Wenner and Walter Gantz (1998) articulate the importance of audience involvement in “Watching Sports on TV: Audience, Experience, Gender, Fanship, and Marriage”: “A person 'dragged' to a sporting event or 'captive'

in the living room keeping company with one who 'has' to watch a game has a very different experience from a fan. Of course, coercion is not necessary to qualify as a 'non-fan', there is a continuum from 'cold' to 'lukewarm' to character people that might better be thought of as 'merely' spectators" (p. 241). This relates to the power sports has in bonding people together, and providing a common fabric on which to base relationships, family and friends alike. The more a sport relates to its fans, and the more the media manages to build and enhance this bond, the larger an audience the sport will benefit from. Despite the power that media holds, it has to work off of something that already exists – in this case a passion for the sport in question.

### **The Olympic Media**

Needless to say, the Olympics represent the largest global sporting platform in existence. Andrew Billings (2008) provides commentary on the potential of this mega-event in *Olympic Media: Inside the biggest show on TV*: "The Olympic telecast is perhaps the most ripe for media effects of any sport event and it may exact more influence than any other television program in the United States. After all, it is the biggest show on television" (p. 139). The Summer Olympics of 1936 in Berlin marked the first televised production of the Olympics as a momentous event (Billings, 2008, p. 1) (See Appendix VI). With TV distribution, Olympic content spread across the world, delivering a unique spectacle to billions of viewers. The influence Olympic broadcasts have remain palpable to this day: "once a sport becomes an Olympic sport, obviously there's a growing fascination with the sport itself from a scale standpoint. And TV is the way you scale sports. That's how you get the most audience" (J. First, personal communication, November 27, 2012). Because of the global nature of the Olympics, the audience-reach increases exponentially and in a way effortlessly from the perspective of the sports promoter.

It's impressive to simply contemplate the media engineering required to televise an event of such magnitude like the Olympics:

Simultaneous events from widely dispersed venues are instantly relayed to broadcast centers and digitized, re-arranged, and transmitted in quite different versions to different national audiences through a complex array of cameras, video decks, editors, signal processors and compressors, microwave relays, satellite feeds, and related technologies all backed with massive managerial, legal, and economic systems. (Real, 10).

Along with all the impressive technical aspects, the Olympics provide a rich viewing experience.

Nancy Rivenburgh (2003), author of *The Olympic Games: Twenty-First Century Challenges as a Global Media Event*, explains the characteristics of the media spectacle: "Media events are a unique media genre that results when television's visual and narrative power taps into public fascination with a story that transcends daily experience" (31). In this sense, the Olympics captivate an incredible audience due to the "narrative" of global unity and national pride that they present. Miguel de Moragas Spà (1992) references this phenomenon in his text "Communication, cultural identities and the Olympic Games: the Barcelona '92 experience": "we could say that the mass media no longer 'broadcast' the Games – as happened in Rome in 1960. Now, they produce the Games and have actually become the hub of their structure" (p. 3). This production takes the sporting event at its center and embellishes it in such a way that attracts new viewers and keeps them engaged. This story-like atmosphere created in sports spectacles is heightened by the unscripted quality of the events. John Davis (2008) explains in *The Olympic Effect: How Sports Marketing Builds Strong Brands* why sponsors are so eager to join in on the Olympic movement: "For companies, part of the allure of sponsoring sports in general, and the Olympics in particular, is knowing that the unexpected could and does happen, bringing added attention and interest to that event and their efforts associated with it" (p. 3).

The recognition of the Olympics as a global brand is truly unsurpassable. In *Sex, Power, and the Games* Kath Woodward (2012) writes about media branding and quotes expert research in the area: "The symbol of the Olympic Games, the five rings, is the most readily identified image in the world. The rings are recognized by over 90% of the world's population, which is even higher than the logos of the megabrands such as Shell and McDonald's" (p. 104). She continues to emphasize the importance of visibility and exposure in the creation of sports media spectacles (Woodward, 2012, p. 101). And sponsors respond well to visibility and spectacles.

With broadcasts focusing on tailored and personalized content, the Olympics have managed to secure their spot in the media industry. Dick Ebersol, executive director of NBC Sports & Olympics, claims that "the Olympics have proven through the nineties – and well into this millennium – that they are the one thing that still does put everybody together in form of the television set" (Billings, 2008, p. 160). During the Olympics, people literally all over the world are watching events in which athletes representing their nation compete for Olympic medals. This puts everyone on a similar plane with a similar interest on a global level. Yet in each country there is a specific narrative occurring, such as in 2008 when Americans were rooting for

Michael Phelps to beat the world record of Olympic medals in swimming. In “Global Games: Culture, Political Economy and Sport in the Globalised World of the 21st Century” John Nauright (2004) quotes Joseph Maguire, an expert on global sport, supporting his argument that “globalized sport can lead to a strengthening of local cultures by re-marketing the same global product within a new niche. While the brand may be global, the sell is local” (p. 1330). The Olympics take on a new meaning when the viewers and fans can connect with an event on a personal level, i.e. having their national team or athlete competing for the gold.

Billing (2008) points to some limitations that TV coverage of the Olympics face, such as time differences, forcing them to manipulate the events to a certain extent: “Events such as the Olympics become pre-packaged events mega-designed for streamlined and effective storytelling at the expense of the ‘naturalistic’, ‘in the moment’ feel that sports on television can uniquely provide” (p. 17). Much like the recent explosion of reality TV shows, the Olympics have become an event where the story or action runs the fine line between authentic and constructed. In “The Olympics as Media Space: The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games from the Interdisciplinary Perspective of Media and Design Studies”, Jilly Traganou and Jaeho Kang (2009) expand on this notion of the event turned into a mediated spectacle: “In the ceremonies of the Olympics, the configurations of time and space, and reality and virtual reality are largely shaped by means of the media technology causing a constant blurring of the boundary between the lived experience of the rituals and the mediated experience of the spectacle” (p. 10-11). The elaboration involved in producing the Olympics has surpassed any previous efforts to simply cover the athletic events. The focus has transitioned into telling a story that can appeal at both the local and global level.

### III. TELEVISED RUGBY AND THE MEDIA SPECTACLE

#### **Rugby Media Coverage**

**On TV – international and national.** One of the few print publications dedicated to rugby in the U.S., *Rugby Magazine*, highlights the growth of rugby at all levels in the country. The editor-in-chief, Alex Goff (2011) writes regularly on the blog GoffOnRugby and follows national competitions like the USA Sevens international tournament held in Las Vegas around February every year, as well as the Collegiate Championship held in June. In the blog post, “The Big Deal”, he explains the importance of these events attracting large audiences: “if you want to



see your national team win an Olympic Medal, if you want more rugby on network TV... the USA 7s and other American rugby events have to be successful... once the sport gets more notice, more legitimacy, and more commercial heft, then anyone associated with rugby can get more done" (Goff, 2011). Most every rugby advocate recognizes the need to raise awareness through media exposure in order to portray rugby as an American sport worth investing in – for athletes, spectators, and advertisers. In comparing rugby's success around the world, the solution seems obvious, at least to Curtis Reed (2012) in "A U.S. team in the Celtic League? Why Not?": "TV is what drives rugby around the world." It boils down to recognition and acceptance from the American public; the sport needs to be publicized so that it can garner the support it deserves.

Indisputably, "Television supports sports. TV networks move in with their money and support sports in a style that would have been unbelievable just a generation ago" (Sage, 2010, p. 160-161). Wolfe et. al (1997) diagram the cycle of success for National Governing Bodies of sports illustrating that with the support of media comes increased participants and spectators, closely followed by increasing revenue and success (p. 59). The rugby historian John Griffiths (2009) chronicles the history of televised rugby in the forum "Varsity Match hat-tricks, Grand Slam tours of the Home Unions and New Year's Day Tests" on *ESPNScrum.com*: "The first live televised international [rugby union match] was the England-Scotland match at Twickenham [England] in 1938... but it wasn't until the Coronation Year of 1953, with television gaining in popularity and accessibility, that regular live sporting broadcasts really captured the public's attention" (See Appendix VI). Analyzing the evolution of TV coverage of rugby in several nations provides an interesting assessment on the command of rugby media. Keith Quinn (2011) of *NZ on Screen* recounts important media moments in "Milestone of Rugby Broadcasting in New Zealand". Arguably the greatest rugby nation to date, New Zealand only received its first live telecast of a rugby test match in 1972 and "by 1974 all All Black test matches — wherever they were played — were shown live on TV" (Quinn, 2011) (See Appendix VI). The terms of this rugby media partnership are further detailed:

As the Government-owned TV organization, TVNZ continued to hold rights to show all games until 1999. Then the rights switched to the privately owned subscriber TV Network, Sky TV. They have steadily expanded coverage so that by the early years of the new century not only all tests, both at home and abroad, were shown, but all

representative matches were telecast as well. A full 'Rugby Channel' was started in 2001. (Quinn, 2011)

While rugby coverage increased, established rugby events and tournaments started looking to TV as a source of revenue. Right before the turn of the century, one of the greatest rugby tournaments was held in Europe, the 5 Nations, featuring England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and France. Needless to say, the tournament transformed in order to adapt to the needs of broadcast media. The head of the French Rugby Union at the time was Bernard Lapassat, now president of the International Rugby Board, and he recognized TV's growing influence. With an odd number of teams, only two games could be broadcast at one time, failing to capture the maximum amount of revenue. Around 2000, Italy's national rugby team was improving significantly and was invited to become the sixth nation — thus the birth of the 6 Nations tournament. With six teams, Lapassat could now negotiate broadcast deals to have three games broadcast at once, bringing in even more revenue (A. Freeman, personal communication, November 27, 2012). Considering the slow start and evolutions of rugby TV coverage in the likes of England, New Zealand and France, it's hard to understate the weaker position rugby finds itself in the U.S.

In *Rugby Magazine's* feature "What it Was, Was Rugby", Allyn Freeman (2009) describes CBS's Sports Spectacular special on intercollegiate rugby on April 10, 1960, marking the debut of televised rugby in the U.S. As America's media introduction to rugby, the segment included a rugby match between Dartmouth and Stanford, played on a field at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. While this was the first nationally televised rugby event, "the first televised US rugby match occurred in April 1957 when an independent station in Oakland, CA showed California playing Stanford at Cal's Memorial Stadium" (Freeman, 2009, p. 55). One of Stanford's key players, Dave Scholz followed in his father's footsteps in contributing to the progress of rugby in the U.S., after Rudy Scholz played on the 1920 and 1924 U.S. Olympic rugby teams. Nevertheless, CBS's presentation was far from revolutionary and according to Scholz, "The post-day viewing of the telecast was horrible to watch and not only because we did not play the game as it was meant to be played. CBS just didn't know how to film a rugby match" (p. 55). After 52 years, similar sentiments seem to prevail, of failed media attempts to positively capture rugby in the U.S.

Still, this reality didn't discourage true rugby aficionados from making further attempts to get rugby on TV. A prime example comes with Patrick Guthrie's approach to the challenge of

increasing rugby's presence on traditional media (before the Internet Age). Since 1995, Guthrie spearheaded the rugby media campaign by producing and negotiating media deals for the International Channel, Fox Sports Network, ESPN, along with other channels. In 2005, Guthrie launched Media Zone, a subscription based Internet broadcast service delivering live rugby content from all over the world, transferred via a live satellite feed. Despite all the efforts put into these projects and negotiations, a clear lack of rugby rights and support in the production costs caused Media Zone to inevitably close in 2010 (P. Guthrie, personal communication, November 9, 2012).

Survey participants were prompted to select which channels they have seen rugby in the U.S.: 76% chose NBC Sports, 64% Universal Sports, 54% Fox Soccer Plus, and around 50% for Setanta Sports and BBC America (See Appendix IV). For a good part of the early 2000s, Setanta Sports provided the most rugby coverage, broadcasting the 6 Nations tournament as well as the 2007 Rugby World Cup, 118 hours total of live and delayed televised games according to the IRB (unpublished). In "Setanta Sports USA To Go Dark Feb. 28", Mike Reynold (2010) explains the tumultuous state of rugby coverage with Setanta Sports turning over most of its rugby rights to Fox Soccer Plus channel in 2010, changing the landscape of rugby media in the U.S. However, it's important to keep in mind that all of these channels are cable networks, except for NBC Sports, which encompasses the coverage given on NBC's main channel. Not only are they stations that come with cable packages, some channels are not available with regular cable bundles and require special request and extra fees, like Fox Soccer Plus. This system is not conducive to reaching the greatest audience possible.

Since the first rugby telecast, U.S. rugby fans have been trying to find and watch rugby on TV just as they would any other sport. From an analysis of survey data, there is a general disappointment with the amount of TV coverage of rugby in the U.S., or lack thereof. The word "more" was mentioned about 401 times over the 500 survey participants' responses. The survey analysis brought about a clear trend of negative feedback concerning TV coverage of rugby in the U.S., noting the areas that need improvement: availability and access, cost, variety, commentary, time, and production.

Coverage of rugby on TV in the U.S. is sporadic and inconsistent. The rugby games need to be easier to find and the schedules need to be more available. Fans are frustrated having to actively search for and "hunt down" programming schedules. A Scottish expatriate since 2008,

Gregory Pinel (personal communication, November 24, 2012) illustrates the difficulty of finding rugby on TV in the U.S.: "To discern who is showing a match and when they're showing it — even in the days of Google — can feel like a crack at deciphering Linear B." When asked how they received information on rugby broadcasts, 68% of the respondents visit a rugby blog or website (See Appendix IV). In the "Other" category, most people included the word-of-mouth method, or hearing about games on TV through other rugby friends. Overall, there needs to be better and more consistent promotion/advertisement on TV networks and other media outlets of when and where rugby games are broadcast. It shouldn't need to rely on word of mouth. Rugby coverage should be included in basic sports cable packages, covered by channels like ESPN. Koma Gandy (personal communication, October 31, 2012), a member of the Northeast rugby community, summarizes a few of the obstacles regarding availability and access to rugby on TV in the U.S.: "Outages, Internet schedules, games blocked due to my IP address, bogus bootleg sites, having to pay \$20 to satisfy Setanta, crowded bars full of English Rugby fans." The general sense is that rugby is hardly ever on TV. When it is on, it's hard to find, and most people end up accidentally stumbling upon it in the end.

At bars, the cover charges are expensive and some games can only be seen with a paid subscription. A lot of fans are underage and don't even have the option of going to bars to follow the sport. Many times this makes fans resort to watching games on the Internet (i.e. YouTube, ustream.tv) where they might be cheaper, or even streamed for free. Yet, even with dodging the costs of bar fees or Pay Per View broadcasts, searching for streaming, even illegally (i.e. torrent downloads), and finding low quality production is frustrating to fans, along with having to watch on a small computer screen.

There needs to be a wider range of games to choose from, not simply championship matches, and there should be more coverage of college games and women's game. There should also be more coverage of the national USA Eagles team. The 15s game isn't shown as much as the 7s game in the U.S. and this takes away from the sport's ability to grow in this country. Furthermore, many channels such as ESPN only show highlights and not the full games.

The commentary is most always geared to newcomers so the rules are constantly being repeated which is frustrating for veterans of the game, and seen as "dumbing down the game". Many times the announcers do not provide in depth game analysis, spend too much time on rugby 101, and insist on comparing rugby to American sports, namely American football. This

results in the use of incorrect terminology and comparisons. Commentators need to strike a balance between being educational without alienating those that know what's going on.

The time difference also makes it inconvenient and difficult to watch the games at a reasonable hour, and the downside to watching on delay is that the score is already out. The main issue here is that most of the rugby content on TV comes from overseas. Replays need to happen at a more suitable time for U.S. audiences, preferably during prime time hours. Perhaps there should be two models, one for the new rugby fans and another for the veterans of the game. Rugby fans have even suggested airing games twice, one at the original time of play, which could mean the middle of the night, and a re-air during the next day. This method could provide a decent compromise to having access to games for veterans and a learning experience for rookies.

The quality of rugby broadcasts is not at the same level of international coverage. Many times games are not even aired in high definition. There needs to be more rugby-experience camera operators and directors, as well as multiple cameras. After following the sport as a fan, player and coach for over 20 years, Mary Swannstrom (personal communication, November 16, 2012) provides a game plan for proper rugby production: "To do it right, you need, at minimum, a game follow main cam, a tight follow from the same angle, a slash cam, a low angle iso from behind each try line, and at least one handheld, though two are better. One to get color, coaches/bench, sin bin, and sideline reports and one to do tight follow of the game."

The overall consensus from survey participants is that TV coverage of rugby needs improvement, namely the amount of games broadcast and the access to these games. Regarding levels of satisfaction with the current TV exposure, 80% of respondents chose a level 1 or 2 in the likert scale of satisfaction with TV coverage of rugby in the U.S., with 1 being "not satisfied at all" (See Appendix IV).

Given that the majority of survey responses came from younger and newer rugby fans and players, it shows that there is a new fresh energy invested in the sport. This group of athletes and supporters are not yet discouraged, they remain hopeful, and certainly are encouraged by the new progress made with the inclusion in the Olympics and other legitimate measures being made in the rugby world. Rugby's presence on TV was a main topic discussed by Guthrie (personal communication, November 9, 2012), who pointed out that despite the lack of major interest from the networks, sports-centered cable TV is proving to be a "bursting marketplace". In order to

attract and convince the networks and cable industries of investing in rugby coverage, the sport needs to present itself as a profitable product. Despite pointing out the flaws in current TV coverage of rugby, survey responders also noted the possibilities that TV can provide for the growth of rugby in the U.S.: better angles and replays, TV format, new talent and inspiration, and a sense of community.

Watching rugby on TV is better because you can see the whole field at once, close ups, different angles of the play on the field (i.e. bird's eye view), and replays which help teach rugby laws, strategy, and decision making to current players. This sort of teaching tool allows players to analyze and incorporate new strategies into their own game and improve their skills. Watching elite players on TV helps aspiring players learn the game.

Meanwhile, the TV format provides a proper platform to showcase the sport. The continuous game doesn't have a lot of stoppages so there are less commercials and the action and excitement translates well to TV. Watching on TV is considered the second best option to seeing the game live. By watching the game in the moment it is happening (except for replays), you can follow the action rather than waiting to read a write-up of the game. Also, watching on TV enables multitasking and being in the comfort of one's home. The majority of survey respondents identified as regularly watching rugby at home, whereas watching at the bar used to be the only option before cable subscriptions were on the rise (See Appendix IV).

Watching professional rugby games on TV gives exposure to up-and-coming rugby talent, especially important now leading up to the Olympics. The idea of rugby as a professional sport has more potential when athletes are showcased. With the creation of rugby heroes and celebrities, the audience will grow to follow the narrative, and youth picking up rugby will have players to look up to. Rugby on TV also brings along information about the teams and coaches, providing some context and teaching about rugby history.

Watching rugby on TV helps connect ex-patriots to their native culture and helps former players stay connected to the sport even though they might not play anymore. It keeps retired players involved in the game and interested in the evolution of the sport. It is also a good bonding activity between friends, teams, and families. It provides an opportunity to teach other people, "non-ruggers", about a sport they are passionate about. Ultimately that is the end goal that every fan, player, and rugby participant is trying to achieve through heightened media exposure of the sport.

**Media brand.** In sum, rugby has to invest in its image, otherwise referred to as its brand (especially in a commercialized sports industry like the U.S.). Kelsey Reed (2012), a blogger for *This Is American Rugby*, comments on the state of rugby media coverage and its inaccessibility in her post "Professional Rugby in America: Introduction". Reed (2012) confirms that the problem with TV broadcasts is that people don't know when or where to watch rugby games on TV. To resolve this issue, networks are partnering up with social media to reach new fans, as confirmed in Bill Gorman's (2011) press release "BBC America And Foursquare Team Up For 6 Nations Rugby": "Teaming up with Foursquare is the perfect way to connect BBC AMERICA's 6 Nations coverage with the U.S. rugby community, and to help new viewers suffering from NFL withdrawal learn how to appreciate this great sport." In the documentary "A Giant Awakens: The Rise of American Rugby", the narrator explains that having rugby broadcast on TV could even translate into better athletes, especially for the youth in that "their muscles are learning while they're sitting down watching it on TV" (BIN15 Productions, 2009). The way rugby is portrayed on TV, and the amount of broadcasts available, can be the answer to getting rugby integrated into the non-traditional market of the U.S. Rugby must adapt to media in order to cement its roots in the U.S. sporting culture.

In order to attract new audiences to a complex sport like rugby, it needs to be presented in a visually appealing and accessible way. Rugby is in fact a complicated sport, with rules that may not be very obvious to non-players. In *Fields in Vision: TV Sport and Cultural Transformation*, Garry Whannel (1992) explains how networks are trying to appeal to new audiences: "The executive producer of ITV's World Cup Rugby coverage in 1991 said he wanted to capture a wider audience than the traditional rugby spectator, intended to give viewers 'the best seat in the house' and hoped to make the game 'easier to understand for the ordinary people' (p. 29). The theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, included rugby in his writing on media as a spectacle. He contributed to the theory that media must appeal to the fans as much as the newcomers, or in Bourdieu's terms: the "connoisseurs" and "laymen" (Schirato, 2006, p. 49). According to Bourdieu, these two classes of people experience the same sporting event in a very different manner:

The 'connoisseur' [of rugby] has schemes of perception and appreciation which enables him to see what the layman cannot see, to perceive a necessity where the outsider sees

only violence and confusion, and so to find in the promptness of a movement, in the unforeseeable inevitability of a successful combination or the near-miraculous orchestration of a team strategy. (Schirato, 2006, p. 48)

Meanwhile, the "laymen", or the non-rugby players, require additional support and guidance throughout the game. This is where sports commentary comes into play and can make or break the deal. Even though fans criticize the persistence of the rugby 101 model, networks are almost forced to keep it mind with rugby coverage since the current rugby market is still a minority in terms of what networks want to see in broadcast ratings.

Writer Kurt Oeler (2012) posts "On broadcasting rugby in America", suggesting how rugby should be introduced by the American media: "In the media business, the trick of 'repurposing' content lies in knowing how much of it stands on its own, and how much repackaging is required in order to make the experience compelling for new audiences. To reach the US market's growth segment -- viewers under 25 -- British productions need more translation." Clearly there are many people willing and ready to watch rugby – over a million, looking at NBC's viewership numbers – but there are also millions out there who are unaware of the sport and its rules (See Appendix V). This audience is where new potential lies and represents the challenge that USA Rugby and all its affiliates face in trying to captivate through rugby. Oeler applauds NBC's initiative of re-airing Rugby World Cup games with American commentators to explain the game in a more familiar context, while "connoisseurs" could still watch the live coverage at the odd hours they normally air. Gary Quinn (personal communication, February 25, 2012), VP of Programming & Owned Properties at The NBC Sports Group, explains the reasoning behind these strategies: "We've tried to bring American voices to this sport... because we want our viewer to hear a domestic voice, because we want to Americanize the sport as much as we can and appeal to the American viewer." With this in mind, there needs to be a multi-fold packaging strategy of TV coverage of rugby: a side targeted to new fans – the Americanized Rugby 101 model; and another targeted to seasoned fans and players who want the extra commentary from the knowledgeable announcers. If a broadcast is dominated by one model, it will inevitably alienate part of the rugby population – new or old.

The challenge of attracting new fans lies in maintaining this delicate balance but also in establishing a media brand right from the start. Susan Broniarczyk and Joseph Alba (1994) lay out the nuances of brand-specific associations as compared to brand affect and category



similarity in “The Importance of the Brand in Brand Extension”. In other words, brand-specific associations in a rugby context would be elements of the brand that the U.S. rugby community is building, such as ideals of sportsmanship, contact without padding, or English heritage. Rugby is known worldwide for the element of camaraderie and sportsmanship: “We all know that rugby is actually one of the only games that promotes respect on the field; something that inevitably translates into life off the field; and something we all want our kids to be is respectful” (Sullivan, 2013). Whereas brand affect is the sensations and feelings that rugby causes to those who observe the game, these are personal reactions, out of any governing body’s control. Lastly, category similarity in this case would most likely refer to the similarities between American football and the sport of rugby, both being contact sports with comparably sized balls. Now the ways in which people receive rugby will depend on their experience and expertise which is why the rugby community needs to invest in building a media brand and connecting with sports partners like football: “brand-specific associations will determine the evaluations made by experts, but brand affect or category similarity will determine the evaluations made by novices” (Broniarczyk et. al, 1994, p. 216). The untapped rugby market in the U.S. is made up of people who are very much aware of football through media spectacles like the Super Bowl, and that for them is their initial point of contact when approached by the sport of rugby.

AdWeek posted the article “NBC Lines up 4 Sponsors USA Rugby Tourney”, in which Anthony Cruppi (2011) registers an enlightening sound bite by Jon Miller, president of programming for NBC Sports: “Our rugby coverage will follow the blueprint for all our sports programming... For a lot of people, this will be their first exposure to the sport, so it’s incumbent upon us to educate them about the particulars.” Rugby and media executives alike agree that rugby adoption in the U.S. is a work in progress, an uphill battle that is definitely making strides but “obviously there's still a curiosity factor that you're going to have for a while until people get used to seeing it” (G. Quinn, personal communication, February 25, 2012). Recognizing the need to enhance the game coverage with educational elements is crucial, but more importantly, treating rugby like any other sport is going to be the attitude that translates to the viewers and sends the message that it is just another great team sport. Player and fan, Megan Gabriel (personal communication, November 2, 2012), voiced a reoccurring survey theme: “ESPN airs spelling bees and poker but not rugby? Really?.” By giving rugby airtime and treating it as equal to other sports, broadcasters are adding to its validity as an alternative sport.

Another aspect of U.S. acceptance of rugby manifests itself in the behavior of the fans. When once rugby fans were seen as violent, drunken hooligans (thugs), rugby fans nowadays are redeeming themselves and shedding a much more positive light on the sport and its supporters. Authors of "Sport and Media", Daniel Beck and Louis Bosshart (2003) believe that the media "blame the hooligans for driving away more 'respectable' fans and see the source of spectator violence in the hooligans' mindlessness, without discussing broader societal problems that may contribute to the situation" (p. 20). Nowadays, more often than not, rugby fans and players pride themselves on fair play and sportsmanship, reversing the hooliganism attitude completely. At games in the U.S., such as the HSBC 7s tournament in Las Vegas, rugby fans are seen following the game with more genuine interest than the social events planned throughout and afterwards (Goff, 2011). Once again, Kelsey Reed (2012), the author of "Professional Rugby in America: The Fans", writes about the condition of U.S. rugby in terms of its fan-base and what that could mean for the future of the sport: "No professional sports team in the world can survive without fans. They not only provide ticket revenue, but they drive advertising and TV revenue." Once fans flock to the sport, broadcast coverage will follow, but at the moment, networks are too hesitant to invest a lot of airtime to a sport with an unstable foundation and meager following in the U.S. Ultimately, the media holds a lot of power and can influence the future of a sport, in this case rugby. Once the media backs up a sport, everything else falls into place: "sportsmen and sportswomen can earn tremendous amounts of money, if broadcasters deem their sport fits television. 'Fit' means that the respective sport creates drama, risks, sensations, and thrills – and enough breaks for commercials" (Beck et al., 2003, p. 12). As a brand and product, rugby has taken steps in evolving in response to the demands of American consumerist culture. The question remains, does rugby fit TV?

**Network partnerships.** In order for rugby to present itself as a spectacle, and to enter the mainstream media repertoire, it needs a distribution channel. Throughout survey responses, rugby fans questioned why there isn't a channel dedicated to rugby or a time slot with consistent rugby coverage. CEO of USA Rugby, Nigel Melville (personal communication, February 22, 2012) follows suit and suggests "one option is to actually purchase those [rugby] rights and put them all into one place where you can go and find rugby." Such a proposition falls along the lines of launching a similar media project like the YES Network. However, the issue is lack of

money and funding. Since USA Rugby cannot take on this project single-handedly, the other option involves securing a media partner who can elevate the sport out of obscurity and bring it into the homes of old and new fans. Using media to propel a sport and bring it into the consciousness of potential fans has been tested and proven, such as the role ESPN played in bringing NASCAR to millions of homes of unaware sports fans (Miller et. al, 2011).

The rugby sport adoption has to happen naturally, but the problem remains the lack of exposure. In this sense, TV should serve as a vehicle promoting the sport but still allowing for viewers to form their own opinion. This falls upon the viewers and potential fans – they must recognize the network's priorities and differentiate those from the sport's efforts. This distinction can be characterized by the functions of the organizations USA Sevens and USA Rugby. USA Sevens is a commercial entity, preoccupied with getting sponsorship deals and showcasing rugby sevens on TV, leading up to the Olympics. Meanwhile, USA Rugby focuses their energy on growing and supporting the sport as an athletic and valuable venture for youth and adults alike. In order for media to invest in rugby, there needs to be a large enough viewership base. Jay Coakley (2001) discusses the process of turning a sport into its commoditized counterpart: "When sports exist just for the participants, there is no urgent need to advertise games, publicize results, and interpret what happened ... There is no need to attract and entertain ticket-buying spectators. It is only when sports become commercial entertainment that they depend on the media" (p. 357). In a commercially driven society, it's all about money, as John Haberstro (personal communication, November 7, 2012), Buffalo Rugby Club member, clarifies: "Rugby coverage will not improve until the media can make money off of rugby broadcasts... Until it can be distributed PROFITABLY, it will remain fringe. This is why 7s can get airtime and 15s gets internet broadcasts and obscure sports channels."

After the 2009 IOC decision to include rugby back in the Olympics, NBC started showing significant interest in rugby due to their position as the Olympic broadcast rights holder in the U.S. Gary Quinn of NBC Sports explains NBC's interest in investing: "Also, to show the folks here in the states why this sport is so popular. We're always looking for opportunities to jump in and have an ownership stake" (Terrigno, 2013). In June 2010, NBC decided to cover one of USA Seven's rugby properties, the Collegiate Rugby Championships (CRCs), held in Ohio that year (See Appendix VI). Following this coverage, NBC continued its support in rugby media exposure and agreed to cover the 2011 HSBC 7's tournament leg in Las Vegas. Allyn Freeman

(personal communication, November 27, 2012) explained the meaning of having a network like NBC broadcast the rugby event: "Because they were able to pick it up, they came with the crane, as they did in Columbus [Ohio], and it looked professional. It looked no different from the NFL."

*Rugby World* (2011) published the article "Rugby confirmed as third fastest growing sport in USA" quoting the Chief Executive of the IRB, Mike Miller as he comments on the partnership of USA Sevens with NBC: "This unprecedented platform means that we have the opportunity to attract millions of people who wouldn't normally see the sport through an internationally-renowned sports broadcaster. We're sure that when they see it on NBC, Americans will be hooked on the highly competitive, fast-paced nature of Rugby Sevens." Perhaps in the near future, fighting for coverage of rugby union is futile until rugby 7s can demand the ratings that sponsors and networks need to be convinced. Once that hurdle has been passed, a new phase of promotion can begin.

The viewership numbers have risen consistently in the past two years of NBC broadcasting the CRCs, after a substantial dip following the first year. Viewership numbers for NBC and NBC Sports coverage of the 2012 HSBC 7s games demonstrate that domestic games aired on NBC enjoyed a substantial audience (See Appendix V). Guthrie (personal communication, November 9, 2012) comments that games broadcast with a domestic tie-in and familiar setting will prove to be a much more attractive opportunity, as compared to simply taking content from international games. Call it patriotic or insular, but Americans prefer things that have a domestic connection, whether that is a game played on U.S. soil or the USA Eagles playing abroad.

The HSBC 7s World Series tournament stops over in Las Vegas every February, and in 2012, this tournament attracted an audience of 1,074,000 for the game on February 12, 2012. All of these games were broadcast on NBC's main channel, with a reach of over 100 million households. Games broadcast on NBC Sports and located in other venues, such as Hong Kong, Japan and England don't seem to attract more than 60,000 viewers (See Appendix V). To provide an indication of the role NBC is playing in the rise of rugby, Sara Bibel (2011) includes some figures in the press release "NBC and NBC Sports Network to Telecast 8 Hours of the 2012 USA Collegiate Rugby Championship": "In total, NBC Sports Group televises nearly 60 hours of live rugby programming annually, by far the most live rugby coverage in the United

States.” Over the last decade, other channels have joined in increasing the TV coverage of rugby with cable channels like ESPN, BBC America, NBC Sports, Universal Sports, Fox Soccer Plus and DirecTV airing rugby events (See Appendix VI). A comprehensive overview of available rugby content in one place is still lacking. Given their interest in Olympics 7s, NBC’s focus is on covering the two USA Sevens events: Las Vegas 7s and CRCs. With this in mind, the other networks need to pick up the slack and follow the example of local station like PCN Sports that has started to broadcast state-wide rugby competitions like the Keystone Rugby Conference.

In speaking with Pamela Kosanke (personal communication, November 2, 2012), Chief Marketing Officer at USA Rugby, the shifting dynamic of 15s to 7s was a consistent theme throughout, defining the negotiations with TV networks. This type of commercial growth and support is difficult to sustain and oftentimes lacks the purity of rugby efforts driven by passion. Even though rugby 7s will be featured in the Olympics, there are still a considerable number of people who prefer to watch 15s. Players and experts invested in rugby have strong feelings concerning the relationship between the two versions of the game. For example, Guthrie views rugby 7s as more of a training vehicle demonstrating the basics of rugby, but not the full challenging experience. Of the 500 survey participants, 57% refer watching 15s while a mere 5% prefer the 7s version (See Appendix IV). Networks are missing a willing and ready market if they choose to disregard the option to broadcast the original rugby union game in its full, continuous form. The 2011 Rugby World Cup, held in New Zealand was the first rugby tournament aired live on a U.S. broadcast network. Despite the Rugby World Cup being the third largest sporting event in terms of viewership ratings (following the Summer Olympics and the FIFA World Cup), NBC only broadcast 3 games out of a total of 48 in the 2011 Rugby World Cup (P. Guthrie, personal communication, November 9, 2012) (See Appendix V). There hasn’t been nearly enough investment in covering the 15s games despite there being a market – characterized greatly by players of the sport that want to watch rugby to help improve their own performance.

In a recent partnership, Grand Prix Entertainment and NFL Network worked out a deal for exclusive live coverage of the Grand Prix Rugby Sevens Championships in the U.S. as commented by Sara Bibel (2012). In the news release “Grand Prix Extends Agreement with USA Rugby Through 2018”, *Rugby America* (2012) provides further comment on this partnership by quoting William Tatham, Founder of Grand Prix Entertainment: “much has happened since we

joined USA Rugby in this crusade to bring the World's Contact Sport to the World's Largest Market... we wisely committed to a multi year – multi million dollar 'off the field' investment focusing on the three critical pre launch start-up phases of planning, protecting and projecting.” In this manner, they recognize that an effective programming strategy involves the whole educational package surrounding the actual sports game – the complete media spectacle. This objective culminates in a sevens tournament with a sizable monetary prize for the winners. Guardian's sports blogger Martin Pengelly (2013) quotes Melville's assessment of Grand Prix' Tatham's creation: “He had a sanction with USA Rugby to deliver a sevens tournament where you'd play for prize money. And so it became the million dollar, winner-takes-all sevens event. When you hear that, you might say: ‘Only in America.’... It's one of those things—it smacks a bit of reality shows and razzamatazz and entertainment.” Otherwise interpreted as the rugby commodity as spectacle.

Nevertheless, whoever distributes rugby games needs to do a better job at promoting and publicizing these games. Since the sports media dynamic is a mutual relationship, there needs to be investment from both sides: “Your partner in media has got to promote it and for them to promote it, they've got to put skin in the game and believe in it. That's the TV business” (J. First, personal communication, November 27, 2012). The unavailability of schedules makes it virtually impossible to win over new fans. Seeing that most people received news of rugby coverage through blogs and websites, this means they had to take a personal initiative to find this information, which doesn't take into account the market of new fans waiting to learn about the sport (See Appendix IV). Meanwhile, go into almost any sports bar in the U.S. and there will be a schedule of NFL football games on table menus and the like. Showcasing sports in bars is a great way to foster this sense of spectacle, but ultimately it has to be accessible. Charging a viewing fee for the few rugby games that are broadcast in the U.S. deters new fans from investing in the sport, and it frustrates old fans. Ted Hardy's (2008) *Rugby America's* blog post “ESPN and USA Rugby Team Up and We Get More Rugby on TV” describes the issue with inaccessibility: “Paying for Setanta or streaming rugby through the internet is fine for rugby diehards, but to pull in children and athletes that have no idea what rugby is, getting matches on even the smaller ESPN channels is vital. It's kind of hard to build a player base when the avenues to reach potential athletes is very limited.” Likewise, George Delaney (personal communication, October 26, 2012), a rugby fan for over 20 years articulated his confused

frustration responding to the survey: "It makes no sense that people in other parts of the world get to watch games for free but yet in a developing rugby market like the US we have to jump through hoops to watch games." Rugby fans feel it deserves a better time slot, not at random hours in the morning. This would also translate to an increase in viewership, if for example, a rugby game followed a popular show or TV segment, using the effective programming mechanism of leading. The rugby community has spoken, and now these decisions now have to be made by the media representatives.

**The 7s spectacle.** While strides have been made in TV coverage of rugby, consistent exposure may come in the form of rugby sevens, characterized by many as "the perfect game for TV" (BIN15 Productions, 2009). In the press release "NBC Sports and Universal Sports Present 15+ Hours of Live Coverage of USA Sevens Rugby This Weekend", Seidman (2011) concisely explains the TV appeal given that rugby sevens "features seven players per team playing on the same size pitch as a 15's match and offers non-stop action where speed, high scoring and athleticism dominate the competition. The format allows for constant entertainment with each match split into two seven-minute halves and a new match starting about every 20 minutes." Quinn (personal communication, February 25, 2012) offers NBC Sport's outlook on rugby 7s: "We think it's very compelling and we think it makes for great TV. It's great for the ADD generation because games only last for 15 minutes." Rugby sevens can become the ultimate spectator sport, combining a high level of fitness with quick action and few pauses in between. Even the breakdown of the game - two seven-minute halves with one minute of half time - can be adapted to the commercial driven U.S. media structure, placing commercial slots between the game's halves, much like the NFL uses stoppages for ad slots (Virginia University of Wellington, 2011).

Because the sevens version is arguably more appealing to the eye, it represents a high quality spectacle (Chadwick et. al, 2010, p. 13). Frank Fitzpatrick (2011), a Philadelphia Inquirer staff writer, published the piece "Rugby sevens championships to get plenty of TV exposure" noting the distinctive qualities of rugby sevens that make it attractive in a media standpoint: "NBC hopes this streamlined version of rugby, speedier and more wide-open, will appeal to American audiences." In a recent research experiment published in the *Journal of Sports Media*, "Viewer Attention to ESPN's Mosaic Screen: An Eye-Tracking Investigation", R. Glenn

Cummins, Lakshmi N. Tirumala, and Jillian M. Lellis (2011) analyzed the elements of a broadcast sports game that called the most attention from the audience: "research examining viewer enjoyment of sports has demonstrated general preferences for game play perceived as more violent" (p. 28). They continue to explain that viewers pay more attention to dynamic elements while ignoring the more static ones, which could directly translate to more coverage of tackles and high intensity rugby plays then time spent on more static plays, such as scrums or line-outs, which still occur in rugby sevens but are over in a matter of seconds (Cummins et al., 2011, p. 30-31).

Harris (2010) mentions that rugby has already begun to undergo this transformation "in the development of the game as a commercial product through the increased 'razzmatazz' that surrounds the sport" (p. 94). Brett Hutchins and Murray Phillips (1999) track the "Americanization" of rugby in the chapter "The Global Union: Globalization and the Rugby World Cup": "The commodification of rugby has, in a relatively short period ... seen the sport embrace sponsorship, marketing and merchandizing to the extent that virtually all features of the playing surface, player uniforms, support staff, coaches and stadiums stand as symbols of corporate capitalism" (p. 158). The way rugby is presented through the media is crucial in creating the sports spectacle that it has the potential to be. The missing puzzle piece in rugby media coverage is funding through sponsors who pay for the ads targeted for that specific audience. Melville (personal communication, February 22, 2012) recounts how this played a part in NBC's coverage of the 2011 Rugby World Cup: "The problem that they had was that the sponsors, the potential purchasers of commercials, weren't interested... So what they did was put a lot of the games behind a pay-per view wall and made their money through pay-per-view." When sponsors sign on to assist a growing product in their development efforts, it shows a level of legitimacy and stake.

Not only is it a fast-paced, continuous game, there is a lot going on off the pitch that is worthy of notice. Sports like American football have achieved sports spectacle status because the game becomes more than just the players throwing a ball around the field; it becomes the whole experience, the background of the teams, the fans in the stands, the images displayed on the jumbotron screen, etc. With the proper sports casting strategy, rugby can appeal to the viewer's emotions by presenting team rivalries, player profiles, training regimes, etc. In a similar manner,



by covering the USA Eagles in their rugby efforts around the world, rugby can latch onto the power of personal connection and national pride that so many other sports benefit from.

Critics still believe more can be done in regards to TV coverage. Preparing to re-enter the Olympics is a giant step for rugby and many see it as a turning point in the success that rugby will have in countries where it has struggled to take hold. Grand Prix, among many other supporters, have announced their belief that “Rugby Sevens has what it takes to be the hottest new professional ‘Sport of the 21st Century’” (Rugby America, 2010). Rugby fans and athletes have the task of branding the sevens game as the ultimate spectator sport, to appeal to the commercialized system in the U.S.

In the meantime, there is a flip-side to the positives of media exposure to a developing sport like rugby. Tony Schirato provides insight on this dilemma in the article “Sport a media spectacle” by a contributor from Virginia University of Wellington (2011): “He says it’s a delicate balance between ensuring sport is interesting and appealing to a wide audience and turning it into a reality TV show that kills the essence of what people love about sport and sporting heroes.” If rugby gets too caught up in the commercial side of things with sponsors and media deals, perhaps the fundamentals will get replaced as well. Jhally (1989) quotes a former football star, John Alt, expressing his hesitations: “The form of the spectacle – commodity rationalization – comes to envelop the structure of sports performances, shaping, changing, and altering the game to meet market and technical criteria... In the extreme, the spectacle form reduces sport to its most banal and sensational elements as standards of excellence are repressed by commercial norms” (p. 81-82). A sport that was originally characterized as informal, simply because of the player-run status and volunteer driven efforts, was built on camaraderie and teamwork and a genuine interest in promoting the game. With new publicity and possibly new stars, will the core principles of the rugby remain intact?

### **Rugby Back in the Olympics**

The 1924 Olympics in Paris were the first to solidify the event’s mass appeal and media interest, and were also the last to showcase rugby as an Olympic sport. Historically, rugby has been met with some hostility from the Olympic Committee, as Mark Ryan (2009) chronicles in the book *Try for the Gold* focusing on the U.S. rugby scene: “The Olympics were supposed to be about the promotion of international sport, not the self-indulgence of one American state. How

could the CRU [California Rugby Union] have the audacity to put in a bid for the funding of a US rugby team at Antwerp, 1920, when nowhere else in America did teams play the game?" (p. 35). The 1924 Olympic rugby match between the U.S. and France was a combination of athletic prowess by part of the Americans and violent hooliganism from the French, as recorded by a Los Angeles Times reporter: "two Americans were knocked unconscious by blows in the face, and a dozen or so others were assaulted...It was the worst bit of sportsmanship ever perpetrated on a sporting field and will not soon be forgotten" (Ryan, 2008, p. 203). Contrary to the Olympic ideals of peace and fair play, "the violence was part of why rugby fell out of favor with Olympic officials." (McMorran, 2011). The rugby community has long felt that the time has come to rebrand the sport and to showcase the positive values and attributes that rugby holds alongside other athletic ventures.

Coincidentally or not, rugby has developed at varying rates all over the world, thriving in certain nations and struggling to remain afloat in others. Despite previous failed attempts to include rugby back onto the Olympic roster, "Rugby's re-admittance to the Olympics was comprehensively confirmed in 2009 at the 121st IOC Session in Copenhagen when Rugby Sevens was added to the Olympic Programme" (IRB.com, 2012, August 10). Al Caravelli, former coach of the U.S. national 7s team "said including sevens in the Olympic program 'gives rugby legitimacy right away'" (McMorran, 2011). By having rugby athletes train at the Olympic level, together with other Olympians, sends the message that rugby is at the same level. As a developing sport, it doesn't ask for preferential treatment but rather equal treatment in order to surpass the status of being a fringe sport, notably in countries like the U.S.

Performing at the Olympics is considered the peak of sporting achievement. Rugby will be taken to the next stage, of becoming a sports spectacle, including fans in more than just the action on the field: "Sport lends itself to spectacle and sensation; it is more than kicking, hitting or catching a ball, or running or jumping it is about success and failure, and hopes and aspirations" (Woodward, 2012, p. 110). Similarly, John Terrigno (2013) shows how the Olympics helps enhance rugby's media brand in the article "USA Sevens Rugby has a local feel", quoting USA Sevens president Jon First: "It's not just blood, beer and guts. It's a top, world-class Olympic sport." Despite personal feelings towards 7s versus 15s, the simple fact that the sport will have Olympic exposure, a new visibility will be gained by having the word "rugby" associated with this particular coverage (P. Guthrie, personal communication,

November 9, 2012). The rugby spectacle will transform and grow in a positive direction with the new visibility provided by the Olympics.

Securing media partnerships isn't easy but inclusion in the Olympics takes care of that right away. By default, NBC as the Olympic broadcast rights holder will cover rugby 7s events. Yet, if the decision back in October 2009 had gone differently, the state of rugby would surely be on a different path: "we [NBC] have a vested interest because it's an Olympic sport now. If it wasn't an Olympic sport, there's an excellent chance that we wouldn't be having this conversation" (G. Quinn, personal communication, February 25, 2012). It simply goes to show the power of media and TV in determining the fate of a growing sport trying to spread its roots.

As repetitive as it may seem, visibility is the key to growth and the key to sponsorship: "The symbol of the Olympic Games, the five rings, is the most readily identified image in the world" (Woodward, 2012, p. 104). This is pretty much the sole concern with sponsors and channels of funding. With this exposure, companies and investors, previously unconvinced with the profitability of rugby will be more inclined to sign on. Sponsors come when they believe there will be a positive return on investment and knowing that the Olympics will be seen by billions of people all over the world is a helpful incentive. As of now, U.S. rugby is supported by their partners Emirates, AIG, Canterbury, and Gatorade. They have enjoyed additional sponsorship by Gilbert, World Rugby Shop, Bank of America, Hilton Worldwide, Osprey, and Powa Products. More effort is being spent on acquiring domestic sponsors, such as the recent partnership with AIG, the first big American company to support the sport (N. Melville, personal communication, February 22, 2012). True progress will have been made in rugby adoption in the U.S. once more American sponsors flock to the sport and back it up.

The Olympics is also synonymous with the best athletes worldwide, the athletic celebrities and superstars. In a review of the book *The Sport Star: Modern Sport and the Cultural Economy of Sporting Celebrity*, Gordon Clanton (2007) describes the appeal and influence these celebrities possess: "sport stars have about them an increasingly rare quality of *authenticity* that gives them the capacity to lift and inspire people. Athletes perform in the public eye and under the pressure of competition with the best opponents. Their failures as well as their triumphs are laid out for all to see and to measure and to analyze" (p. 49). Already, rugby is creating this star narrative with players like Carlin Isles, former college track and football star, boasting a 10.1 second time running the 100m. Bleacher Report's rugby contributor, Jeff Hull (2013) discusses

the emergence and effect of American rugby stars: “New stars like Isles are being lured out of the unparalleled production line of U.S. colleges at an ever increasing rate, a trend that spells bad news for the sport’s traditional rugby powers, like England and New Zealand.” Referring back to Olympic media, USA Rugby is following the structure of selling the global Olympic product at the local level by working with the national Eagles players in their local markets and developing stories around them (N. Melville, personal communication, February 22, 2012). But Kellner (n.a.) warns of the false hopes these associations can create, stating that “although it is positive for members of the underclass to have role models and aspirations to better themselves, it is not clear that sports can provide a means to success for any but a few” (p. 22). This topic of putting too much hope on following a professional athlete’s career is one being discussed at length by experts and researchers alike. But with a sport like rugby, still in its initial stages, false hopes are less likely to be developed since even the best of the best aren’t fully recognized as professional stars.

Given the sheer reach of the Olympics, rugby will surely benefit from this new exposure. The officials at the IRB (2010) report on the value of this new market in the post “IRB outlines Olympic planning to ANOC”: “Rugby is now played by over three million registered players in 117 countries. And rugby Sevens, in particular, is played across the IRB’s six global regions by both men and women in over 100 countries. We want Rugby to be played across all 205 Olympic countries.” With more competitors and worthy opponents, rugby as a sport can strengthen and grow. Throughout the campaign to get rugby reinstated into the Olympics, Olympic-rugby.org (2010) released the post “Olympics to be rugby’s calling card” mentioning the leveled playing field that the Olympics will provide: “Other nations can compete and rise to the top - not just the usual NZ, 6 nations, etc. so [rugby sevens] has more appeal to audiences and other nations in terms of patriotism.” Rugby in the Olympics will launch a new phase of popularity for the sport worldwide, and on a national level. It will particularly reach out to the youth and new generations of rugby athletes.

All the elements of rugby and media exposure culminate in the development of a new generation of athletes, as quoted before: “Exposure leads to aspirations and goals for younger players” (Reed, 2011). Patrick Guthrie (personal communication, November 9, 2012) examines the potential in developing a rugby mindset early on and the benefits of creating instinctive rugby knowledge at an early age, which will become natural reflexes as they progress in the

game. Ultimately, the goal is getting rugby to infiltrate the system and get 10-12 year olds in America to pick up the ball with that aspiration that rugby will be their game, looking at the Olympics and domestic rugby heroes for motivation. To complete the cycle, this new player base and support will translate to more media coverage by the national networks that will see rugby as a worthwhile investment.

## **Conclusion**

With Roone Arledge spearheading the movement, sports and media have formed an important yet complex relationship (Murray, 1986). Over the years this dynamic has led to a power struggle between media initiatives and sports development, and this remains true for the sport of rugby in the U.S. This idea of the sports spectacle becomes crucial in a capitalist society like America where rugby cannot merely rely on a long standing tradition and history for support. Despite U.S. rugby's successes in the early 1920s, namely winning the last gold medal in the 1924 Paris Olympics, rugby has encountered many obstacles to making it's way back into American homes (Olympic.org, n.a.).

In order to insert rugby into the U.S. sporting culture, the media presentation and packaging needs quite a bit of improvement. Along with an increase in TV coverage of rugby, these broadcasts need to be promoted and publicized to facilitate access for the fans. This goes hand in hand with the timing and programming efforts in terms of making it easy to find and easy to follow. With an increase in coverage directed at the new and old rugby fan, the audience and participation levels of the sport are sure to increase and multiply.

Meanwhile, the future of the sport lies in new generations of rugby athletes adopting the sport and following professional players on TV, nationally and internationally. Not only is it important to invest in grassroots promotion of the game, with a special focus on youth programs, there needs to be substantial efforts in developing a professional element to the sport in order for these young athletes to have something to aspire to. Coakley (2001) references this connection in the sports world, which can be a determining factor in the success of any game: "Children are great imitators with active imaginations, so, when they see and identify with athletes, they may create informal activities or seek to join youth sport programs to pursue TV-inspired dreams" (p. 377).

In the same light, rugby needs the support of parents, to encourage their kids to pick up

the sport and practice it. Rugby shouldn't be characterized by the contact element but rather by the character-building portion, which so defines it as a team sport. It is a sport that promotes camaraderie, discipline and sportsmanship above all else. Teaching the sport within this framework will be key to rebranding rugby: "the kids now playing are certainly giving us a new identity, and a lot more excitement about the game" (N. Melville, personal communication, February 22, 2012). Athletes who excel on the field, also shine off the field in these areas.

The notion of "TV-inspired dreams" relates to the transformation of the sports spectacle and the onset of sports as a form of reality TV (Virginia University of Wellington, 2011). By analyzing the change in TV coverage of rugby in the U.S., the evolution of rugby into sports spectacle can be seen occurring gradually. Narratives are being created around rugby players like Isles, youth are pursuing the sport with Olympic medals in sight, and more networks are putting aside slots for rugby programming. David Rowe (2004), author of *Sport, Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity*, highlights the new sports model: "The 'spectacularization' of sport through television and the apparently increasing desire of sports spectators to become integral components of the sporting text itself intertwine the practice, mediation and experience of sport" (p. 176). This returns to the elements of brand-specific association and brand affect. Rugby must enhance its image and brand in order to make fans connect and feel something. *OPEN Magazine's* contributor Vijay Parthasarathy (2011) explains what a sport must do to garner the viewer's attention: "Now it's all very well to appreciate a sport for its qualities, but fans are not unbiased creatures. They need something to root for, colourful characters to valourise and pillory... In the end, it's the humanizing aspect that makes or breaks a sport: the drama that makes it watchable or unbearable." This need to enforce fan involvement with the sports media spectacle is certainly on the minds of U.S. rugby advocates: "Those in charge of building American rugby into a global powerhouse are confident that watching players like Carlin Isles—as he blasts past enemy tacklers live on network TV—will keep the amazing momentum their sport has earned alive and well" (Hull, 2013).

Inevitably rugby must adapt to this trend of "spectacularization", if it wants to be accepted into the U.S. sports culture. And with the opportunity to perform on the greatest global sporting stage, the Olympics, it has a chance to reach an unprecedented number of new and interested fans through media coverage alone, the majority from TV. As rugby fan John Purcell (personal communication, October 25, 2012) succinctly states: "Rugby is the greatest sport, and

Rugby 7's is the best TV sports product ever created." It may not seem like a planned distinction, but rugby [15s] and rugby 7s may very well have to take two different paths, when it concerns TV coverage and general media exposure in the near future.

The media presentation of rugby needs to take into consideration the new fan and the veteran loyal followers. Even though 7s may be the key to presenting the sport to the American public at large, there is a lot of potential in the college and women's game — especially taking into consideration that the U.S. is the leading nation with female rugby participation. Meanwhile, equal efforts need to be contributed towards the growth of grassroots rugby (youth, high school, and college) alongside commercial rugby (elite, professional). These two models and packaging campaigns are interdependent on each other and while they may seem like two agendas at odds with each other, they actually fuel each other's successes. In reality, the cooperation of both models can prove to be beneficial in terms of providing checks and balances in dealing with the "spectacularization" of rugby in an effort to maintain the essence of the sport intact.

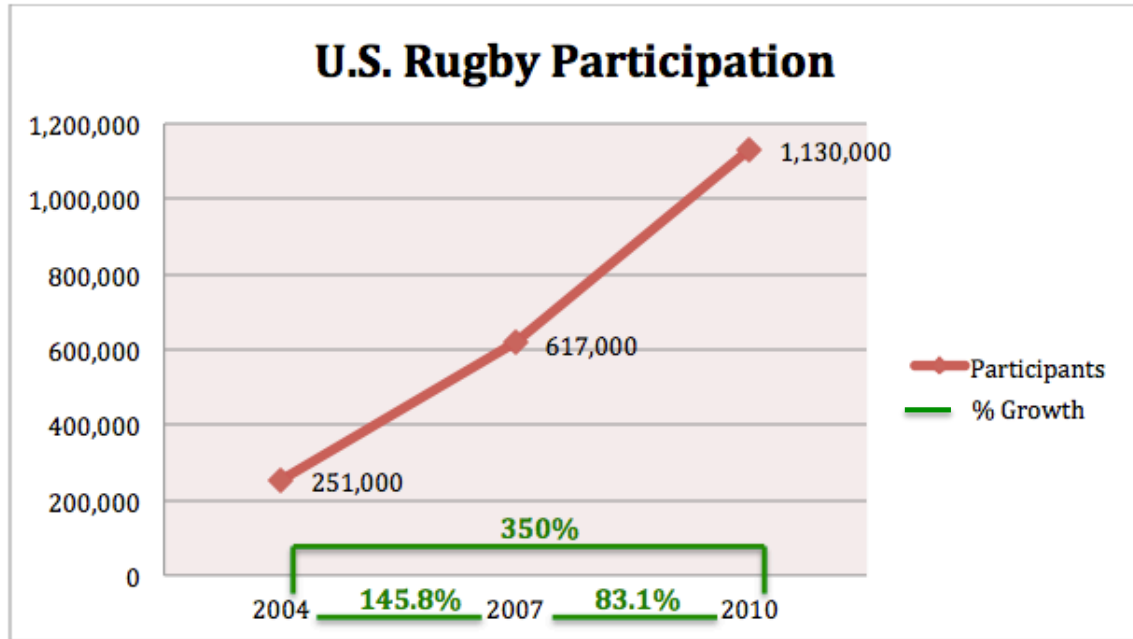
After all, the full 15s game of rugby is complicated and appeals largely to players of the sport, who by definition are also fans. But it may not be the best "product" to sell the sport and to turn the game into the spectator sport it needs to become. Douglas Kellner (n.a.), a professor of philosophy at Columbia University, published the essay "The Sports Spectacle, Michael Jordan, and Nike: Unholy Alliance?" in which he discusses the fate of sports in the U.S.: "Postindustrial sports, by contrast, implode sport into media spectacle, collapse boundaries between professional achievement and commercialization, and attest to the commodification of all aspects of life in the media and consumer society" (p. 4). We live in a consumer society where the spectacle is of utmost importance; it generates the most profit since it can garner the most attention. Therefore rugby in the U.S. should heed this reality and recognize that its commercial TV selling point lies in rugby 7s, in Olympic 7s. Despite the slow start, rugby and media executives are hopeful with comments like "It doesn't command the ratings yet, that's the problem. It will, eventually" (J. First, personal communication, November 27, 2012). On a similar note, NBC is excited in their role in the rugby world: "We're hoping that we can take some steps forwards here domestically to make it more of a part of the DNA of the sports landscape" (G. Quinn, personal communication, February 25, 2012).

Lastly, while TV coverage represents the mass mainstream media, able to attract a large audience at once, going digital is another viable option for an effective rugby media exposure

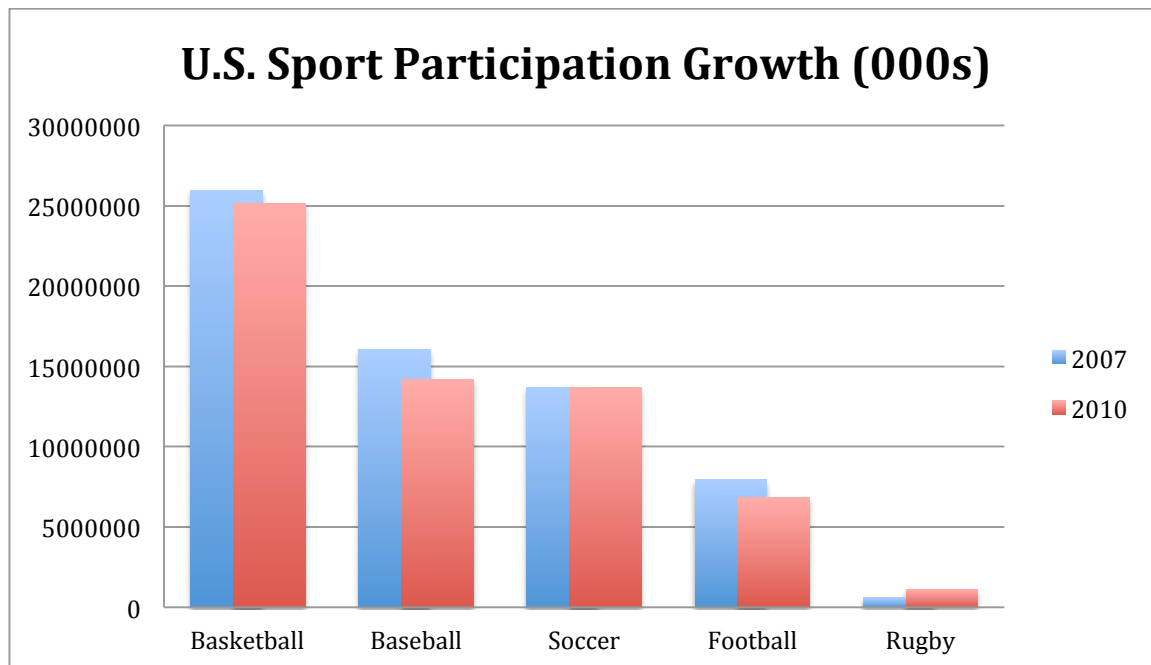
campaign. Web streaming and mobile devices hold a lot of potential, especially moving forward with the improvement in the quality of these products and services. Both Melville and Kosanke (personal communication, February 22, 2012; personal communication, November 2, 2012) mention the possible benefits of webcasting alliances, seeing it as the most lucrative opportunity and platform moving forward in media exposure and monetization. Digital platforms are proving much more entrepreneurial and according to Guthrie (personal communication, November 9, 2012), it is “unquestionable that the digital wedge is going to be the more effective tool for rugby development.” However, before rugby as sports spectacle can enter into the age of new broadcasting, it must establish itself first in the traditional model. Digital coverage requires a personal effort from the fan to find rugby material; it represents the one-to-one relationship media can have with the sports follower. Yet rugby fans in the U.S. may not be ready to take control of their rugby viewing experience - so TV broadcasts have to make the introduction, paving the way for new media where audiences can take an active role using digital technology. In this case, TV represents the one-to-many, capturing the interest of those who were unaware of the sport beforehand and become convinced with its sales pitch.



## Appendix I – Participation

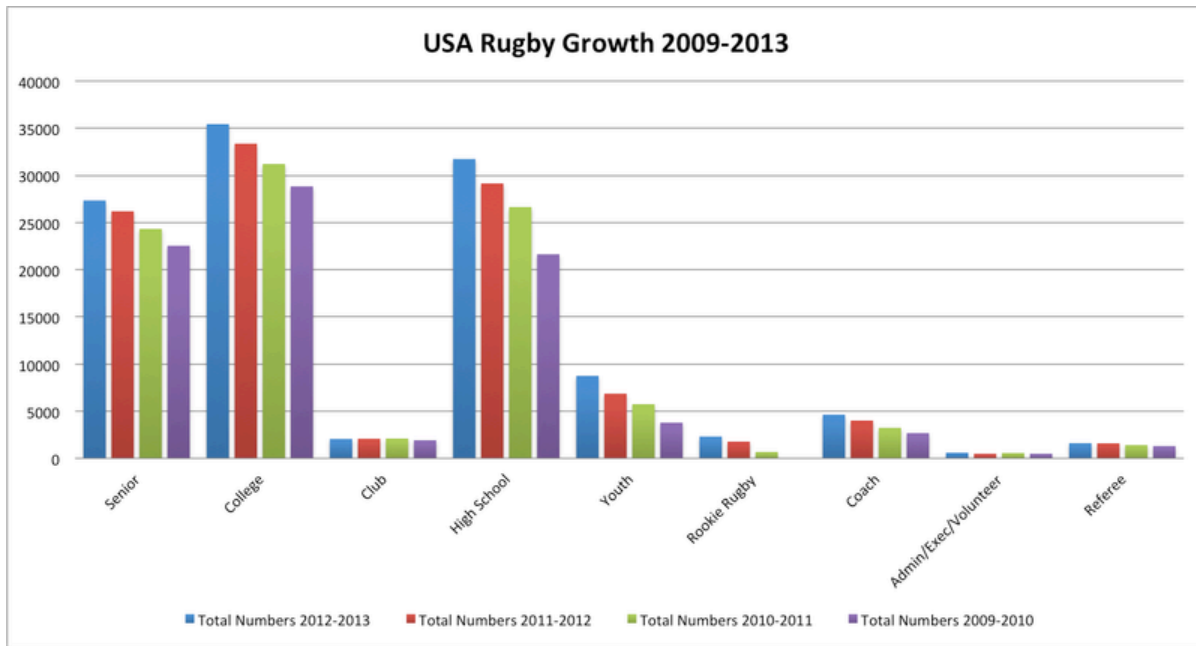


Source: SGMA Single Sport Report Rugby 2011; Estimates based on Economic Impact Report on Global Rugby

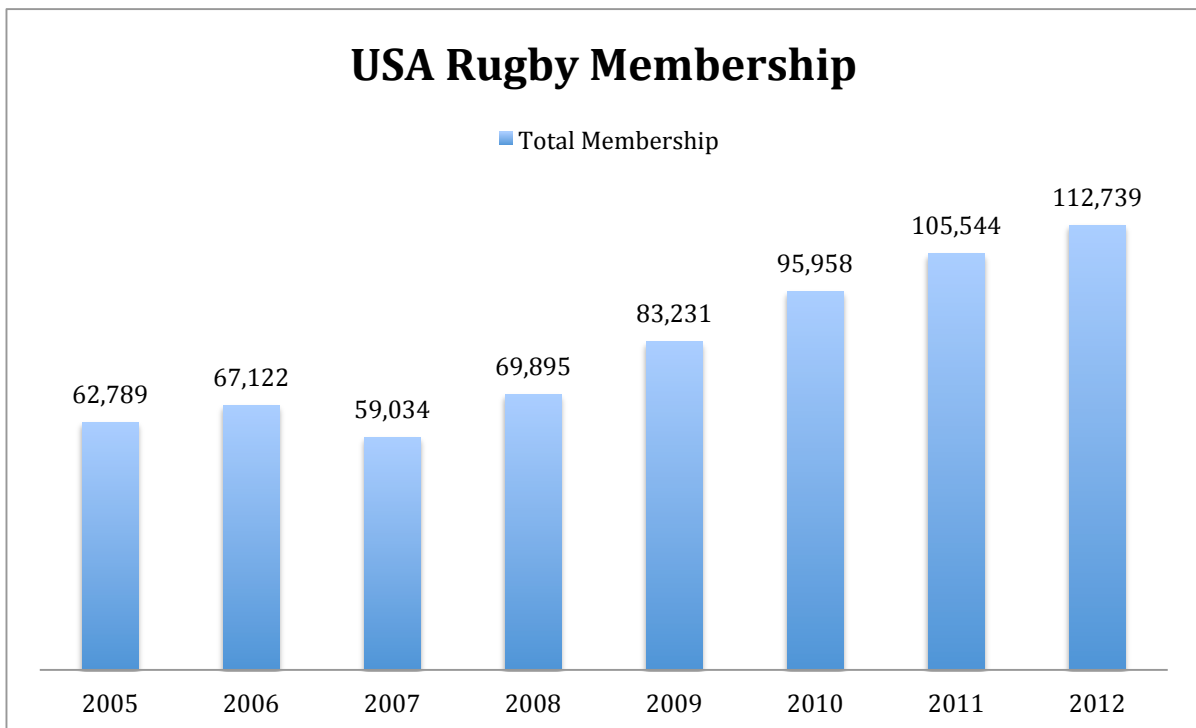


Source: SGMA 2012 Sports, Fitness, Leisure, Activities, Topline Participation Report; SGMA Single Sport Report Rugby 2011

## Appendix II – Membership



Source: USA Rugby (Laura Gill, Communications Manager)



Source: USA Rugby (Lucy Zugschwert, Membership Manager)

## Appendix III – Survey

# Rugby TV Coverage in the U.S. - Graduate Thesis Survey

Dear rugby fan,

I would really appreciate your taking the time to fill out this survey for my thesis research - I'm analyzing rugby TV coverage in the United States. It should only take about 10 minutes.

For background information on my thesis, feel free to visit my site: <http://martatartar.com/thesis/>.

Please forward along to any and all rugby contacts in the U.S.! Thank you for your time.


Marta Tartar  
MA in Media Studies  
The New School  
[tartm329@newschool.edu](mailto:tartm329@newschool.edu)  
[martatartar.com](http://martatartar.com)

Name

Contact Email

*Optional*

What is your age range?

Where do you live in the U.S.?

How long have you been a rugby fan?

- ☐ Last 5 years
- ☐ Last 10 years
- ☐ Last 15 years
- ☐ Over the last 20 years

**What is your rugby involvement?***Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Fan
- ☐ Coach
- ☐ Player
- ☐ Referee
- ☐ Parent
- ☐ Expert
- ☐ Other:

**What was the first rugby game you watched on TV in the U.S.?***Include all information you remember - date, location, etc.***What channels have you watched rugby on in the U.S.?***Check all that apply.*

- ☐ NBC Sports
- ☐ Universal Sports
- ☐ BBC America
- ☐ Fox Soccer Plus
- ☐ ESPN
- ☐ Setanta Sports / Premium Sports
- ☐ America One
- ☐ ABC Sports
- ☐ DirecTV
- ☐ Other:

**Where do you watch rugby on TV in the U.S.?***Check all that apply.*

- ☐ At home
- ☐ At a bar
- ☐ At a friend's house
- ☐ Other:

**Where do you find information on rugby U.S. broadcast schedules?***Check all that apply.*

- ☐ TV Guide
- ☐ A rugby blog/website
- ☐ A rugby Facebook/Twitter page
- ☐ A rugby magazine
- ☐ Other:

**Do you prefer watching rugby 15s or 7s?**

- ☐ 15s
- ☐ 7s
- ☐ Both equally.

**What do you like about watching rugby on TV?**

**Have you encountered any challenges/difficulties to watching rugby on TV in the U.S.?**

*Briefly explain.*

**What needs improvement in terms of rugby TV coverage in the U.S.?**

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Amount of rugby games broadcast
- ☐ Quality of coverage and commentary
- ☐ Accessibility of game broadcast schedules
- ☐ Support from networks during technical difficulties
- ☐ Nothing needs improvement
- ☐ Other:

**What changes, if any, would you like to see in rugby TV coverage in the U.S.?**

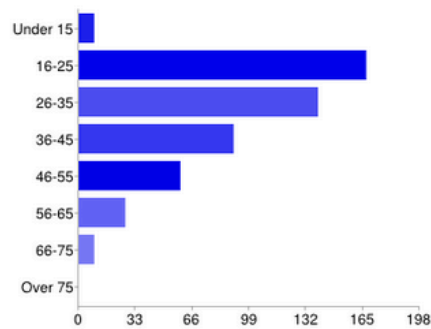
**How do you feel about the rugby TV coverage in the U.S.?**

1 2 3 4 5  
 not satisfied at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ very satisfied

**Submit**

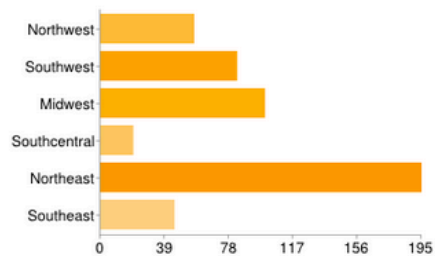
## Appendix IV – Survey Responses

### What is your age range?



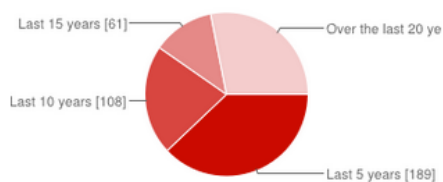
Under 15	9	2%
16-25	167	33%
26-35	139	28%
36-45	90	18%
46-55	59	12%
56-65	27	5%
66-75	9	2%
Over 75	0	0%

### Where do you live in the U.S.?



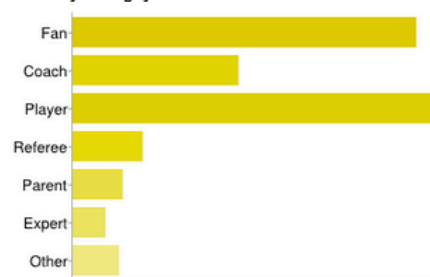
Northwest	57	11%
Southwest	83	17%
Midwest	100	20%
Southcentral	20	4%
Northeast	195	39%
Southeast	45	9%

### How long have you been a rugby fan?



Last 5 years	189	38%
Last 10 years	108	22%
Last 15 years	61	12%
Over the last 20 years	140	28%

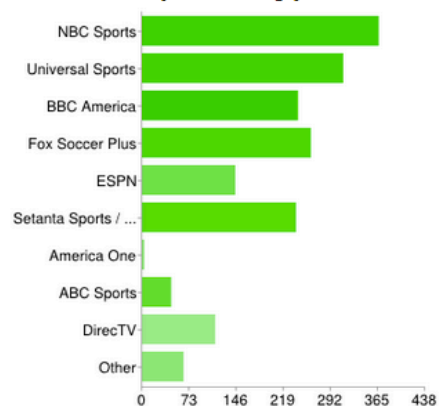
### What is your rugby involvement?



Fan	377	76%
Coach	182	37%
Player	395	79%
Referee	77	15%
Parent	55	11%
Expert	36	7%
Other	51	10%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

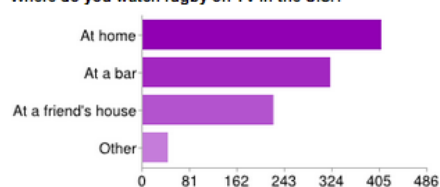
### What channels have you watched rugby on in the U.S.?



NBC Sports	366	76%
Universal Sports	311	64%
BBC America	241	50%
Fox Soccer Plus	261	54%
ESPN	144	30%
Setanta Sports / Premium Sports	238	49%
America One	3	1%
ABC Sports	45	9%
DirecTV	113	23%
Other	64	13%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Where do you watch rugby on TV in the U.S.?



At home	407	83%
At a bar	320	65%
At a friend's house	223	45%
Other	43	9%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

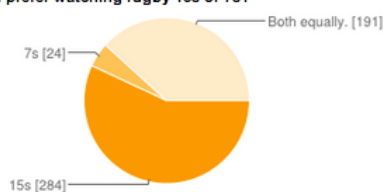
Where do you find information on rugby U.S. broadcast schedules?



TV Guide	88	18%
A rugby blog/website	324	68%
A rugby Facebook/Twitter page	207	43%
A rugby magazine	80	17%
Other	127	27%

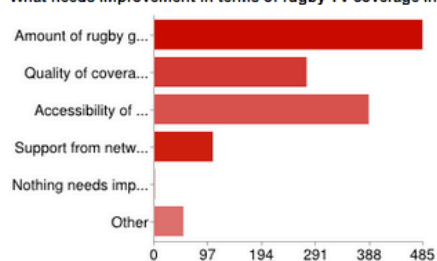
People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Do you prefer watching rugby 15s or 7s?



15s	284	57%
7s	24	5%
Both equally	191	38%

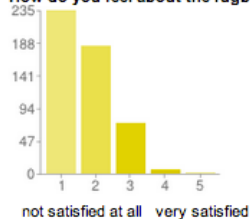
What needs improvement in terms of rugby TV coverage in the U.S.?



Amount of rugby games broadcast	483	98%
Quality of coverage and commentary	274	55%
Accessibility of game broadcast schedules	386	78%
Support from networks during technical difficulties	105	21%
Nothing needs improvement	1	0%
Other	52	11%

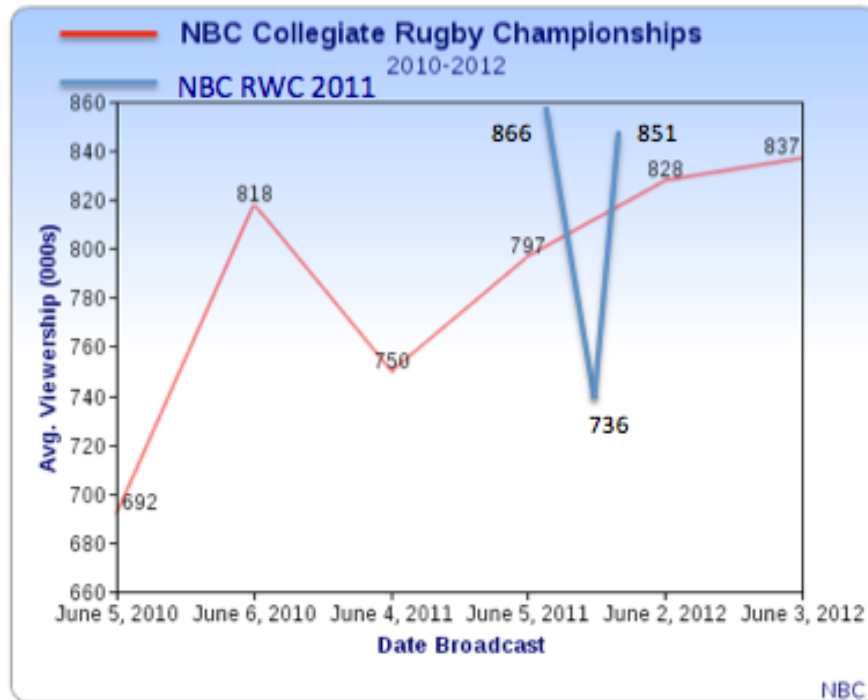
People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

How do you feel about the rugby TV coverage in the U.S.?

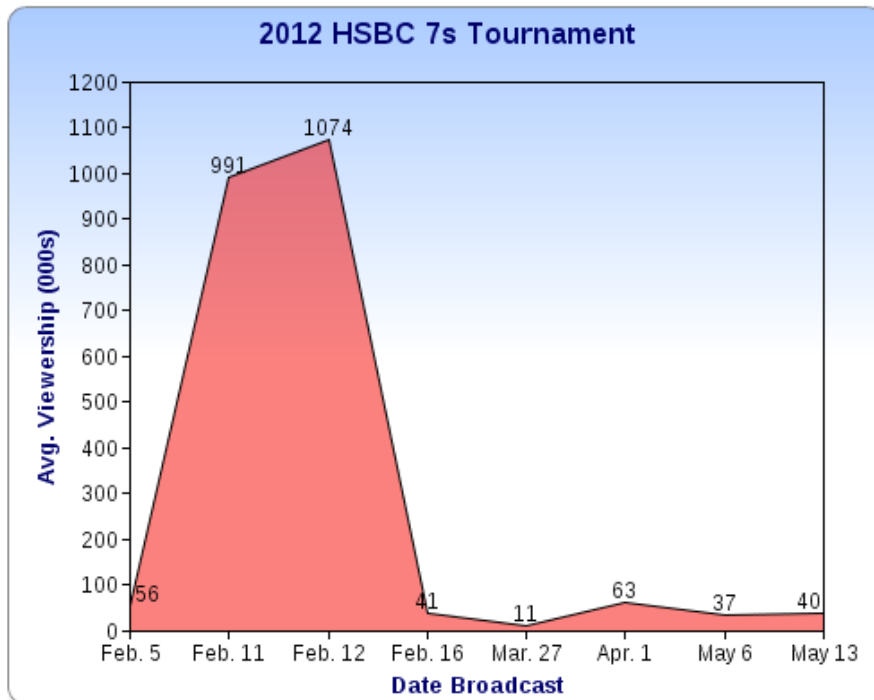


1 - not satisfied at all	235	47%
2	184	37%
3	73	15%
4	6	1%
5 - very satisfied	1	0%

**Appendix V - TV Coverage**



Source: NBC (David Mueller, Programming Coordinator)



Feb. 5 – New Zealand (NBC Sports)

Feb. 11 – Las Vegas (NBC Main)

Feb. 12 – Las Vegas (NBC Main)

Feb. 16 – Las Vegas (NBC Sports)

Mar. 27 – Hong Kong (NBC Sports)

Apr. 1 – Japan (NBC Sports)

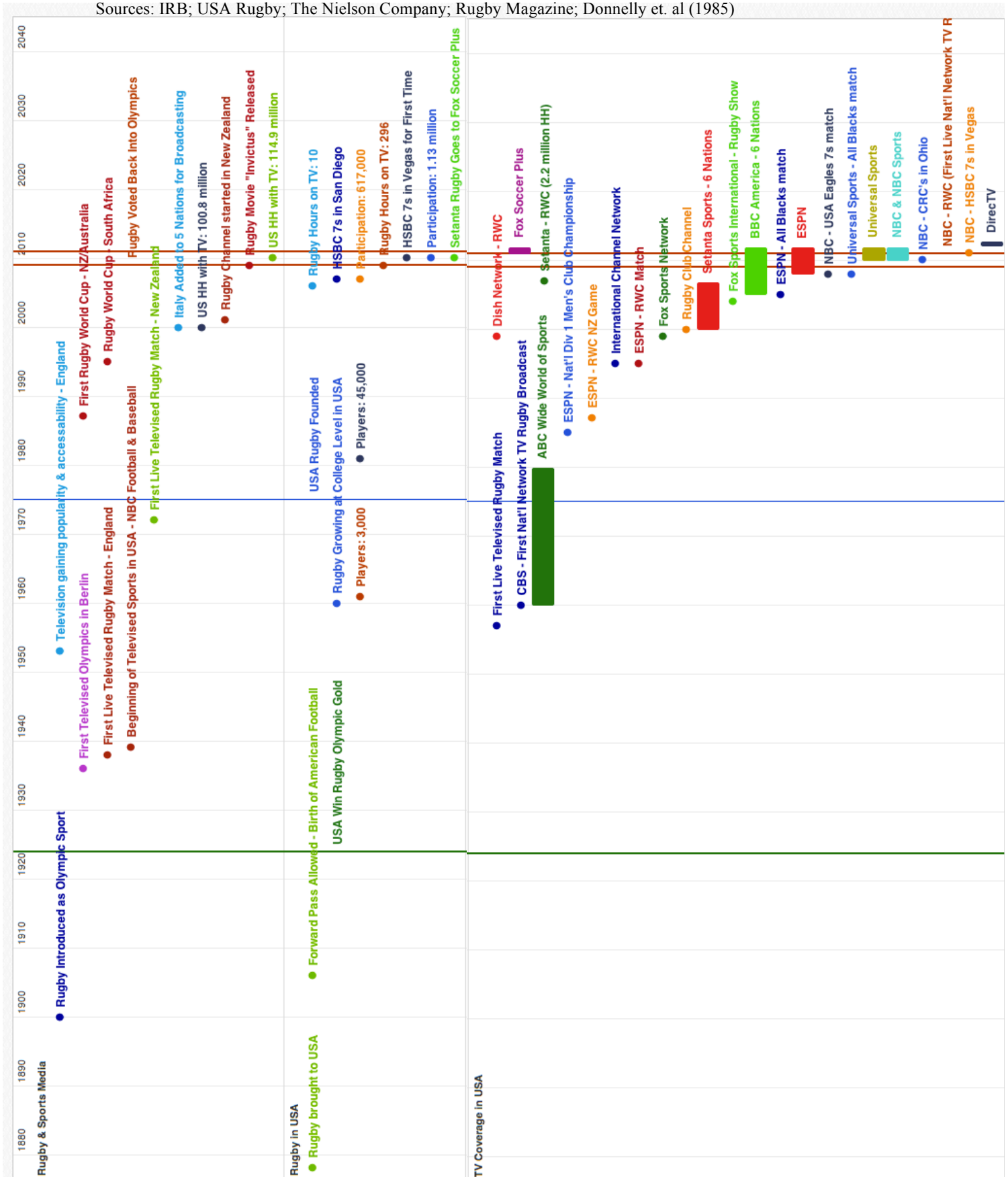
May 6 – Scotland (NBC Sports)

May 13 – England (NBC Sports)

Source: NBC (David Mueller, Programming Coordinator)



Sources: IRB; USA Rugby; The Nielson Company; Rugby Magazine; Donnelly et. al (1985)



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