

Fairfield Rugby Coach Praises 'World Class' Iona Ahead of Their In-State Clash

Fairfield University Men's Rugby is set for a big early season test - a date with in-state rival Iona University.

The Gaels themselves are coming off of a 40-7 victory in their home opener against Fordham, a game in which the Gaels found themselves trailing 7-0 early on.

Fairfield are reeling after two wins over the University at Buffalo and Nazareth College.

I got to sit down with Head Coach and Director of Rugby at Fairfield Austin Ryan, as he highlighted the keys to staying focused over the two fixtures.

"Nazareth really tested us. What we really did well that we usually don't, is we managed the ebb and the flow of the game. There are always three points in a game - when things are going really well, when things are teetering, and when things are not going well. We really did well against Nazareth in that regard."

In the club's victory over Buffalo, Coach Ryan rang a different sentiment for his team's success.

"Anytime you have to get on a bus and go seven hours, it challenges your mental toughness. Coincidentally, our bus broke down, so we had a three hour delay."

Luckily, Coach Ryan's boys didn't have any plans of soaking in the sorrows of their unfortunate circumstance - only arriving to the field less than two hours before kick-off.

"Led by our senior class, we arched our backs and did what we were supposed to do. Now we're tried and tested, ready to go up against Iona, who is world class."

Iona, a perennial top team in D1A over the past few seasons, will be led on Saturday by talented scrum-half Brenden Buckley, physical prop Oisín McDonagh, shifty back player Viliami Hopoi and versatile hooker Jordan McKenzie.

Additionally, Iona Head Coach Paul Burke might have some conflicted interest in the match, as his son, Pat Burke, is enrolled at Fairfield and is a back player that

might be featured off the bench versus his dad's team.

Fairfield are returning several players from last season, led by senior leaders Nick Laponese and Connor Rinklin. Another key player for the Stags is flanker John Thompson the 4th, son and grandson of, you guessed it, John Thompson the 3rd and John Thompson the 2nd respectively.

While Thompson's elders made their respective mark on the hardwood, according to Coach Ryan, this young man is making his on the rugby pitch.

"JT is the blood of our team. When he's flowing, we're doing beautiful things."

Iona enters play at 1-0 on the young season, as the highly anticipated match will serve as the first regular season game for Fairfield. Kick-off is scheduled for 3pm at Mazzela field on Saturday, September 17th.