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Fifteen college men storm the rugby field, ready to face their opponents in the hot summer heat, wearing their typical jerseys and cleats. Only, this time, they've added a twist to their usual game-time attire in the hopes of distracting the opposing team: jean cut-off shorts and neon socks.

This is just one way the OU men's rugby club team keeps the mood light, despite the physically arduous sport they play. And Dakota, psychology senior, has been part of the team's ranks since his freshman year, wearing his No. 8 jersey loud and proud.

Dakota specializes in the 8-man position, which is rugby's version of football's middle linebacker. He started playing rugby, getting into biffs and restarting plays in scrums, his freshman year of high school and now hopes to play after college. He'll be traveling and playing overseas in Scotland, picking up tips and tricks from more experienced players in Europe, where rugby gets more recognition than it does in the U.S.

"It's hard to get people out to the games," Dakota says. "It's kind of frustrating, because you want to get big groups of people out there, but it just never really happens."

And Dakota has proven he has the skills to make his dreams of joining a national team someday a reality — he's ranked No. 5 in the



collegiate Top 10 Tries list and has earned a spot on the West All-Star team and regional Heart of America rugby football union team the past four years.

"It's [success] definitely been through following the leader kind of stuff. The captain of my high school team my freshman year was a huge inspiration to me, because I used to be short, fat, out of shape, and he just refused to let me slack at practice," Dakota says. "So, he dragged me through the dirt and made sure I got my stuff done, and I just took that mentality into it every year."

The team practices constantly and travels to nationwide matches without the same funding an NCAA team would get.

"We were ranked highly the year coming into my freshman year, and

since then, we've kind of taken a dip. We've had a lot of good athletes graduate," he says. "But to finally be back up there, it means that what we've been working for, it's been for something."

During practice, the team switches it up, from running drills on the field to attending yoga sessions to loosen up muscles. Although Dakota has never joined in on any downward-facing dog, he has hit the pool for a team workout.

When they aren't battling it out at rugby matches across the nation or at OU's home field, he and the team spend time bonding and making their own fun.

Dakota says the men push one another's buttons all in good fun and create a general silly atmosphere. Sometimes they'll play a booger, or a touch football game, showing their true passion for rugby. When they've finally put away the rugby ball, the team will host their own parties, where they'll sing along to the music and socialize with all who attend.

Dakota also spends time catching up on TV shows, like "White Collar" or "Breaking Bad." Otherwise, he'll grab a sci-fi book like his favorite, "Ender's Game," or waste time on Stumbleupon.com.

In the future, Dakota hopes to put his rugby skills to good use as a professional player.

"I want to make a career if it's possible," Dakota says. "You can leave everything on the field and know that at the

end of the day, that worst-case scenario, you gave it all that you had and you shouldn't be upset with yourself."

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FITNESS

ON THE RUN

Two-time marathoner Slayde Meyer worried college would make running another race impossible, but after a strong 20-mile training run, Meyer now is confident he will finish his third marathon Sunday — and set a personal record doing so.

"I hate it. I hate running," said Slayde, University College freshman. "But the thing is, I love running in the marathon. And I love the benefits. Running for me is a **HAVE TO.**"

LANEY ELLISOR | WORDS
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