

Alfred men's rugby team wraps up memorable season

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NORTH ADAMS, MA The Alfred men's rugby team ended one of the most successful seasons in program history at the National Small College Rugby Association Northeast Region Championships Nov. 18-19 at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

Alfred was hoping to claim the regional crown and advance to its first-ever national championship tournament (Champion's Cup) next spring. Instead, Alfred dropped a 48-12 semifinal decision to eventual regional runner-up Maine-Farmington, and was edged 6-5 by Paul Smith's College in the third-fourth place match.

Alfred, which had previously won the NSCRO Upstate Championship with a win over Paul Smith's on Nov. 4 and claimed a regional-qualifying victory over SUNY Maritime a week later (Nov. 11), finished the season with a 9-2 record.

Despite the setbacks, Alfred's season was arguably the most successful in the 32-year history of the program. The 2017 team enjoyed its first-ever unbeaten regular season and was also the first to beat Ithaca twice in the same season.

Alfred won its first-ever NSRCO Upstate championship in 2017. In 1996, the Alfred team won Upstate Rugby Union and New York Rugby Conference Division II titles; neither of those organizations exists today. The 1996 team lost one regular season match and wrapped up the year with a 9-2 record, losing in the semifinals of the Northeast Regional championships before winning its third-fourth place match.

William Pulos, who founded the Alfred rugby club team in 1985 and served as coach 1985-90 and again from 2009-12, now assists the program in an advisory capacity. The team, made up of students from Alfred University and Alfred State College, is led by player-coach Rick Crouse, an Alfred State student.

Nationally, 261 teams compete in play sanctioned by the NSCRO. Four teams competed in each of four Regional Championships, meaning Alfred was among the final 16 in Champion's Cup tournament play. Despite Alfred not advancing out of regional play into next spring's four-team national championship field, the local squad is ranked among the top 20 small college rugby team in the country.

Pulos thanked alumni sponsors for helping defray the cost of competing in the Upstate championship game in Syracuse as well as the regionals in Massachusetts. A select group of Alfred University alumni (all former Alfred rugby players who played in the late-1980s) donated a total of \$5,000 to pay for transportation for the two trips. They included 1987 graduates Joe Antalek, Chuck Miller, Carter King, and Adam Quick; 1988 graduate Scott Hollander; and 1990 graduate Eric Yeager.

Pulos said the group of Alfred rugby alumni who donated to the club unanimously voted to authorize funding for transportation after the team qualified for the Upstate title game in Syracuse. The donations were made in memory of their former teammate, Dr. Jeff Hollier. A 1988 Alfred University graduate and Upstate Rugby Union Academic

Athlete of the Year as a senior, Hollier passed away in 2009.

This marks the first time the Alfred team has chartered transportation to its postseason venues. For the team's three-day, two-night trip to Massachusetts for the regional championships, the team used the services of Niagara Scenic Tours, whose president is Keith Fisher, a 1976 Alfred University graduate. Pulos also thanked Alfred University for funding room and board for the team.