

KOREA SET TO BECOME POWERHOUSE OF WOMEN'S RUGBY

Meet Seoul Sisters—the only
rugby squad in the world to be
copied by Kanye West
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Photographed by Ryu Seunghoo





Korea's football mania, kicked off by the 2002 World Cup and continued into extra time by the presence of star Korean players in European teams, shows no signs of dying down.

Rugby has not sparked the same level of passion here—yet.

If the bunch of players sidestepping and tackling each other on a pitch by the Hangang River on a recent Saturday morning has its way, however, women's rugby may be set to gain ground in Korea. Welcome to Seoul Sisters' weekly training session.

National team

It's not too serious for everyone yet—some of the players are out for the first or second time, still getting the hang of throwing and catching the egg-shaped ball smoothly and making sure their passes go backwards. Others are accomplished players, such as Jin Min, who played on the Korean national women's rugby team for the short time that it existed last year. "It was intense," says Min of the six months that the team spent training and living together full-time under the guidance of Korean rugby star Moon Young-chan.

Driving force

A major force in Korean women's rugby is Natalie Halleman, a teacher at Dongguk University, who heads Seoul Sisters. "I've played rugby in plenty of countries," she says. "When I go somewhere, I play rugby. I hate being a tourist. I'm going to play rugby in Colombia this summer."

Halleman first came to Korea in 2005. She wasted no time, and an international touch tournament was held here in 2007. It has now

become an annual fixture, International Touch Seoul.

"Make sure you watch our video on YouTube," says Halleman, before returning to the pitch.

Seoul Sisters comprises players of touch rugby, of contact rugby and of both. Captain of their touch team is Theresa Tupuola, a New Zealander of Samoan descent, who teaches English in Gangnam. "Our objective is to grow the sport and get more people involved," she says.

Touring overseas

To this end, Seoul Sisters have a new touch coach in the form of Marcus Powell, a New Zealander who has been playing touch for 20 years and is a member of the Hangang Exiles, another Seoul-based touch team. "Touch is a good training game and a very fast sport," he says. "In Korea, people like the social side of it. It's a very family-oriented sport, well suited to Korea.

Seoul Sisters meet for practice every Saturday on a training ground by the Hangang River, near Apgujeong Station. They usually practice touch rugby from 9am and contact from 11am. The team's two or three annual weekend tours—past destinations include Beijing, Guam, Thailand, The Philippines, Hong Kong and Tokyo—are another key part of their activities.

If you want to play 7s, 15, contact, touch or just have a bit of fun and exercise at the weekend, get in touch with the Sisters.

Sure enough, the Sisters' YouTube music video (bit.ly/e50PqI) is awesome. So good, in fact, that Kanye West has blatantly plagiarized it in a version of his own that involves a woman nicking his money. 🙄

MORE INFO

Visit www.ssrfc.com or search for Seoul Sisters Rugby Football Club on Facebook.

Seoul Sisters meet for training every Saturday morning at Jamwon Hangang River Park: Apgujeong Station, Line 3, Exit 6. Walk past the apartment blocks and take the second road on the right, passing the high school on your left. Turn left before the embankment, then right to pass through the tunnel. The Sisters generally hang out at Scrooge Pub in Itaewon.

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