

Media Relations

UNH PhD Student To Play In Rugby World Cup

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UNH Ph.D. candidate Jamie Burke (in black scrum cap) will be playing in the World Cup rugby match in London next month. Photo credit: Bill English

DURHAM, N. H. - Some college students are involved in multiple extracurricular activities. For Jamie Burke, there's just one—rugby--and it is all-consuming for two reasons. First, because she's a member of the U.S. Women's National Rugby Team headed to her second World Cup. And second, because Burke is in the process of getting a Ph.D. in outdoor education from the University of New Hampshire. The two take all of her time. And then some.

Burke is a prop, also known as a front-rower. She has played in 24 international matches, and is co-captain of the U.S. national team.

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She began playing rugby in 1998 during her freshmen year at the University of Virginia. In 2006—the same year she was accepted into the Ph.D. program at UNH--she represented the United States in the World Cup, held in Edmonton, Canada. Training led her to defer for a year because she knew her schedule couldn't support the demands of both school and sport.

"Throughout the past three years that I've been at UNH, I have wound up taking work with me when we travel," Burke says. "Some students can be involved in a lot of extracurricular activities. I have one and it is all-consuming."

Here's why: in 2009, from August through November, Burke played with Beantown, the women's rugby team in Boston. When the season ended, they had national team training at the Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, California.

In January, there were a series of matches against Canada in Lakeland, Florida. February marked the beginning of the spring season, which culminated with a tournament in Minnesota during Memorial Day weekend.

In the middle of all that, there were more national training camps. From June 6 to June 20, the U.S. team trained in Victoria British, Columbia. They've been in Brunswick, Maine, since July 10. On July 31, Burke and her teammates will have a week off before leaving for London Aug. 8 for the World Cup play.

"With the type of schedule we have, school can be challenging but I've managed to pull it off," Burke says. "I think that the discipline that goes into playing an international sport has helped me get through school because I only have a limited amount of time so I have to be on top of things when I am doing work."

She also has made a deal with herself to not stress about her dissertation until September. "With the current pace I am going at for rugby, I couldn't give it the time it needs, but am going to be full tilt once the World Cup is over," Burke says.

And she doesn't want anything to take away from that experience. Playing in a World Cup is incredible, Burke says.

"Everyone has the same purpose. You have more than 30 women with the same goal—it's pretty amazing. It's not very often that we're in that situation, where everyone has a unified sense of purpose," she says. And after London? Will she continue to play rugby as intensely, aiming for 2014?

"I don't know. For the past six, seven years, rugby has been the focal point of my life. I don't know if it can continue to be that way," Burke says. "It really depends on where I end up after I get my Ph.D. I want kids; I want a family. Those things are a little hard with rugby life. But if the stars were to align and I could do it, I would play in another World Cup."

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

-30-

A photo of Burke can be downloaded at http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2010/jul/jr26burke.jpg. Caption: UNH Ph.D. candidate Jamie Burke (in black scrum cap) will be playing in the World Cup rugby match in London next month. Photo credit: Bill English

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