

SUBWAY

Profiles

ELLEN MUSGRAVE

This Women's Rugby Player Will Punish You!

Blood ran down Ellen Musgrave's face, the red liquid still warm and Musgrave could taste it on her lips. As a freshman at Texas State University, this was her first experience getting tackled while playing for the women's rugby team, and the opposition was fierce.

Looking back, Musgrave, now an electrical engineering senior and the team's president and captain, says she probably broke her nose that day after being hit by a player from a team she can no longer remember. The injury may have caused her to sit out for the remainder of the game, but it didn't break her spirit.

"We tend to get pretty tough girls; they tend to bounce back ...," Musgrave says of those past and current Texas State Women's Rugby players.

This includes herself.

The former Taekwondo martial artist, who says her body's smaller than the average female rugby player, has intimidating biceps (she calls them "chicken arms") and a toughness that stems from her outward appearance: a sleeveless T-shirt, black bandana, and nose ring.

Then there are her cat-shaped metal knuckles that hang off her key ring...

All of that aside, the Tulsa native is quick to offer a friendly hug and freely admits her weaknesses, which included rugby, a sport that was tough for her to learn how to play. She says her team members, her best friends, have continuously helped her succeed in the sport and that she has done the same for them.

"The rugby community's probably the best: they are the funniest people, the most trustworthy people. Honestly, like you know, you can freely leave your stuff out and know that no one's gonna mess with it if you're at a rugby thing. That's just not gonna happen. And if someone else sees something, they would totally say something," she says.

Love may mean you never have to say you're sorry, but when it's your team's opponent, there's rarely a reason to apologize, even when you've injured someone.

Musgrave says she has seen some "pretty horrific injuries" on the field from players being tackled wrong and from just pure exhaustion: a broken elbow and fibula (calf bone), a shattered tibia (shinbone), her roommate's torn ACL, and a possible mild concussion of her own.

This incident "freaked" out Musgrave's parents who, accustomed to her feminine sisters' ways, are admittedly not the biggest fans of the Texas State Women's Rugby team.

"My dad actually just told me that he'll be excited the day I stop playing rugby," the now fly-half says, a rugby position that involves more brain than brawn. "I'm like, 'Dad, it might be a while, so get used to it.'"

The sentiments Musgrave's parents have about the sport are also shared by the parents of some of the other team members.

It's this parental fear of their daughter getting injured that lends itself to "closeted rugby players," those members of the Texas State team who haven't told their parents they play the sport.

"If you play safe rugby, you're not gonna get hurt," Musgrave says, adding that players' nails are even checked before each game to prevent accidental (or ruthless) scratches.

Still, the sport comes with caveats.

Back-to-back games, playing the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University, among other large rugby teams, and a drop in the number of players last year may have attributed to many of the injuries Musgrave has seen in the four years she's been a member of the Texas State team.

So, the team decided to move from division one to the Lonestar Women's Collegiate Conference last fall in an effort to grow its membership and become more competitive.

"We're such a disaster as a club, but we have such a great time, we do," says Musgrave.

"WE TEND
TO GET
PRETTY TOUGH
GIRLS."