

TECH RUGBY



ALUMNI CHAPTER

FALL 2025

MAGAZINE



inside **TECH RUGBY** *alumni magazine*

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Alumni Chapter **UPDATE**

What a year it's been. Whether you're still recovering from your last alumni weekend or just catching up from afar, we wanted to take a minute (or a few) to fill you in on what the Tech Rugby Alumni Chapter has been up to this past year—and what we're building toward with your help.

From the sidelines to the spreadsheets, from pitch-side cheers to planning behind the scenes, this alumni chapter is growing into something truly special. And that's thanks to all of you—our community of teammates, friends, and lifelong ruggers who keep the spirit of Tech Rugby alive long after graduation.

The Chapter Magazine

The original plan was to make it a semi-annual publication, but unfortunately, we weren't able to get the spring issue out in time—so we ended up with just one edition this year. That said, we're proud of what we did produce, and we're hopeful we can get a spring edition out next year to get back on track.

If you've gotten a chance to flip through the magazine, you already know—it's more than just a newsletter. It's a snapshot of what makes Tech Rugby great. We pack each issue with updates from the team's season, highlights from events, alumni spotlights, and notes from fellow ruggers. Whether you're in town or halfway across the country, it's a chance to stay connected and feel like you're still a part of the squad.

We've gotten some awesome feedback so far, and we're just getting started. We're always open to suggestions, so if you'd like to contribute photos, stories, or ideas for the next issue—reach out!

Where We're Going: Goals for 2025 -2026 (and Beyond)

This year has given us a strong foundation—but now it's time to build.

Here are a few of our key goals for the next chapter:

- **Update 100 Alumni Contacts:** We want to reconnect with as many former players and supporters as possible. That means refreshing emails, phone numbers, and mailing addresses so no one misses out on news, invites, or opportunities to plug back in.
- **Raise \$50,000 Over the Next Four Years:** That's a big number, but we've got big dreams. This fund supports team operations, alumni gatherings, and scholarships. It's about legacy—and making sure the next generation of Tech Rugby has even more to work with than we did.
- **Get 50+ Alumni to Contribute to Dues:** Our alumni dues are \$120 a year—just \$10/month. Those dues help us fund alumni events (more on that in a second), and build a strong, active network. Whether it's covering food at a watch party, helping send the team to a tournament, or helping get alumni to travel to nationals—it all starts with you.

Alumni Events: Let's Go Beyond the Sidelines

We know not everyone can make it to rugby matches, and that's okay. This year, we want to grow our alumni activities beyond just the rugby calendar. Some of our ideas for the upcoming year include:

- Alumni Golf Outings
- Fishing Trips
- Local Bar Meet-Ups
- Group Trips

Got ideas? Let us know! We want events that bring people together—on and off the field. Whether it's 5 folks grabbing drinks or a full-blown tailgate crew, the point is staying connected and having a good time.

Get Involved – Stay in the Loop

It's easier than ever to stay up to date and involved with the chapter. Here's how:

1. **Follow Us on Social Media:** We're starting to be active on Instagram and Facebook—sharing throwbacks, game-day pics, and alumni updates. (@nmtrugby_alumni)
2. **Visit Our Website:** Bookmark it. Everything from event announcements to magazine issues and team schedules live there. (www.nmt.edu/advancement/rugby_alumni.php)
3. **Become a Member:** Sign up and stay in the know. Members receive all our updates via email, including early access to events and exclusive alumni content.

We Want Your Feedback

This alumni chapter is only as strong as the people in it—and we want to make sure it reflects what you want.

How can we improve our contact outreach?

What kind of events would you actually come to?

What would make it easier (or more fun) to stay connected?

If you've got thoughts, shoot us a message or comment on a post. We're building this together—and the more voices we hear from, the better it'll be.

To every alum who donated, showed up to an event, helped organize, or even just sent us an encouraging message—thank you. This community only works because people like you still care about Tech Rugby and want to see it thrive. Let's keep the momentum going. Whether it's coming out to an event, paying your annual dues, or helping us find those 100 new alumni contacts—every bit helps.

Here's to another great year, more wins (on and off the field), and keeping the Tech Rugby legacy going strong.

See you soon—

Your Tech Rugby Alumni Chapter Team

A Tradition Reunited

The annual 49ers Rugby Weekend returned to Socorro last October—and while the final score wasn't in the alumni favor, the weekend was packed with everything that makes Tech Rugby what it is: brotherhood, beer, tradition, and a whole lot of heart.

With 30 alumni in attendance, old teammates reconnected, new friendships formed, and the legacy of Tech Rugby continued to grow—on and off the pitch.

Friday Night Vibes & Match Day Moments

Things kicked off the way they always should: with pre-match beers and stories flowing freely at the now-iconic Elijah Naranjo RV, posted up pitch-side like a true clubhouse on wheels.

Before kickoff, the team held a moment of silence for Jeremy “JR” Hart, a former player and foundational leader of the once-called “Pygmies.” The news of JR’s passing reached us that morning, and the tribute was heartfelt and somber—a moment that reminded us all how deep these rugby bonds run.

Let’s just say it wasn’t the comeback story the alumni had in mind. The current NMT squad came out flying, showing speed, fitness, and structure that overwhelmed even the wiliest of veterans. Despite a valiant effort, the final whistle blew with Tech taking the win, 80–19. The score lit up proudly on the EMRTC-sponsored scoreboard as players shook hands and shared laughs, sore bodies aside.

Post-Match Honors & Awards

Tradition continued after the match with a round of awards recognizing standout players on both sides:

- Outstanding Player: Lucas Chavez (NMT Hooker)
- Outstanding Ancestor: Brian Arko
- Outstanding Forward: Dylan Merrigan (Ancestor)
- Outstanding Back: Nick Hutt (NMT Inside Centre)

The group celebrated with a mix of pride, heckling, and appreciation for what each player brought to the pitch—regardless of age or fitness level.

Auction Night at Cap: Old Stories & New Goals

As the sun dipped below M Mountain, the crew made their way to Capitol Bar for the famous post-match auction. The laughter was loud, the drinks cold, and the auction items... a little sparse this year. Still, the group raised \$900 to support the club—a respectable total, but noticeably lower than years past. The drop may have been due to a lack of gear or the absence of classic non-rugby auction items, like the ever-popular “Smoke of the Water” trout fishing trip with Dave Wheelock.

No worries—plans are already underway to bring the heat back for next year’s auction.

49ers Weekend Recap

Saturday Morning – Washed-Out Plans & One-Man Traditions

Saturday morning rolled in with a vengeance, as a copious downpour late Friday night put an unfortunate end to the much-anticipated DW Golf Scramble. The scramble had been advertised and planned, but the weather had other ideas—turning the greens into puddles and pushing most alumni to rethink their morning.

Well... most.

While the rain washed away everyone else's tee times, Mark Kelly stood alone at the clubhouse, undeterred. A fixture of the 49ers golf tradition, Mark wasn't about to let a little weather—or the total absence of other golfers—stop him. He swung. He played. He kept the streak alive. And in true Pygmy fashion, he made sure the tradition didn't go down with the storm.

Back in town, a few alumni—perhaps driven by the need for breakfast beers or just some soft lighting—found their way back to Cap for a little rugby-style recovery session. By pure coincidence (or fate), they ended up right where the 49ers Parade wrapped up, just in time to catch the Rugby Club's low-budget, high-energy “walking float”. Just ruggers marching down the street, representing the club with gritty pride and proving once again that Tech Rugby doesn't need much to show up strong.

Between the one-man golf game, the impromptu parade watch party, and a few more morning beers, Saturday morning managed to capture the very essence of 49ers: unpredictable, heartfelt, and absolutely unforgettable.

What's Next: A Bigger, Better 49ers

The Tech Rugby Alumni Chapter will now take the reins on organizing Rugby 49ers this fall.

What does that mean?

- Intentional efforts to revive Pygmy traditions like team songs, boat races, kangaroo court, and more
- An upgraded auction experience, with more items, better prizes, and maybe even a few surprises
- DW Golf Scramble part 2: grab a Techie and buy them a round of 9 holes to connect and give advise to the next generation.

Our goal is to make 49ers more than a game. We want it to be a full-on rugby reunion that honors the past, celebrates the present, and fuels the future. The rugby tent outside the Cap will be back up with door prizes and ways to win without the wallet talking.

To everyone who made the trip, laced up their boots, shouted from the sidelines, bought a round, or just showed up to reconnect—thank you. Weekends like this are what keep our rugby family strong. If you missed this year, no worries. The next 49ers Weekend is already in the works—and we promise it'll be one to remember.

Stay tuned. Stay involved. Stay proud to be Tech Rugby.

Alumni Spotlight

DYLAN MERRIGAN

Keeping the Internet (and the Scrum) from Collapsing

Some heroes wear lab coats. Others wear rugby jerseys. And then there's Dylan—a 2009 New Mexico Tech graduate in Electrical Engineering who does both, ensuring the world stays connected while also body-slamming people on weekends.

Dylan started playing rugby his freshman year at New Mexico Tech, despite one small hitch: he didn't like competition. "I was sick of practice and sports when I left high school," he admits, "but something about rugby—maybe the camaraderie or the chaos—just clicked." That one impulsive decision led to five full years of scrums, tackles, and questionable post-game celebrations in Socorro. And it didn't end there.

Today, Dylan plays prop for the Santa Fe Santos, a role that has him literally holding up the scrum and keeping everything from collapsing—a fitting metaphor for his professional life.



By day, Dylan works at Los Alamos National Laboratory in telecommunications, helping to build and maintain the infrastructure that keeps scientists, engineers, and support staff connected. It's high-stakes, detail-driven work, but Dylan thrives under pressure. "In rugby, if you don't communicate well or do your part, everything falls apart. Same thing in telecom," he says.

Outside of work and rugby, Dylan's life is full—and often full-contact. He and his wife, whom he met at New Mexico Tech while serving in student government, now have two kids: a 7-year-old son and a 4-year-old daughter. Both have already caught the Jiu Jitsu bug, and Dylan couldn't be prouder. "We're definitely a grappling family now," he laughs.

Whether he's fixing networks, flattening opponents, or cheering on his kids from the mat, Dylan brings the same energy, grit, and groundedness to everything he does. He's proof that New Mexico Tech alumni aren't just brainiacs—they're leaders, athletes, parents, and, sometimes, walking Wi-Fi metaphors.



“

To our alumni, we thank you for the continued support and encouragement. Your legacy inspires us to push our players to greater heights both on and off the field. As we start this new chapter, we invite you to stay in contact, share stories of your experiences, and cheer us on. With this, we can ensure together that New Mexico Tech Rugby continues to grow and thrive.

If you'd like to support the program or be kept in the loop with any updates regarding this, feel free to get in touch anytime. We look forward to hearing from you!

Respectfully, *Coach Jason*

”

Tech Talent Joins the Grizzlies: Hutt & Chungong Earn All-Star Honors

Being part of the Pacific Coast Grizzlies rugby program is a rare opportunity—an honor that only a select few collegiate athletes earn. This year, Nicholas Hutt and Akongnwi Chungong joined that elite group, representing Tech at one of the biggest showcases in college rugby: the NCR All-Stars Weekend, held in early January.

These two ruggers didn't just get a call-up—they earned it. Their skill, discipline, and tenacity on and off the pitch caught the eyes of coaches across the region, landing them a coveted spot on the Grizzlies' roster.

What Is the NCR All-Stars Weekend?

The National Collegiate Rugby (NCR) All-Stars Weekend is a high-profile event where top players from all divisions (DI through DIII) come together to compete in a fast-paced, 15s tournament format. Six regional teams across the U.S battle it out in:

- 20-minute halves
- Pool play and bracket rounds

Players get four days of practice with their new teammates before stepping onto one of the biggest stages in American collegiate rugby. That means rivals—like players from Colorado School of Mines—suddenly become allies. The Grizzlies bring together talent from seven western states, giving them a broad yet challenging recruiting footprint.



About the Grizzlies Program

The Pacific Coast Grizzlies have been a dominant force in All-Star rugby, reaching the championship match four years running and taking home the title in 2020.

But there's always a mountain to climb. Their main rival? The New England Red—a team that functions more like a year-round academy than a regional all-star squad. While most regions assemble their teams just before the tournament, the Reds train together throughout the year. They also field two full 15s squads, compared to the single team each other region brings. With five programs located within an hour of each other, the East Coast benefits from geographic proximity and a larger talent pool. It's a huge advantage—and one the Grizzlies constantly battle to overcome. Meanwhile, the Grizzlies cover seven states, with teams often five or more hours apart, making recruitment, development, and team cohesion far more difficult. Yet year after year, the Grizzlies show up. They compete. And they represent the West with pride and power.

PAC-COAST GRIZZLIES



Tech on the Big Stage

For Hutt and Chungong, this wasn't just another tournament. It was a chance to test their mettle against the very best student-athletes in the country. It's also a major opportunity for exposure: scouts from every Major League Rugby (MLR) team are in the stands, watching, recruiting, and dreaming about their next draft pick.

And these two brought the heat.

Hutt, known for his creativity and work rate in the backline, and Chungong, a force in the backs with a tireless engine, both held their own—and then some. Tech's presence at the All-Star level continues to raise eyebrows around the country, and these players are helping to put the program on the national map.



Brains, Brawn, and Balance

Tech rugby players have earned a unique reputation in the collegiate world: they're not just athletes—they're some of the most academically intense athletes on the field.

Balancing one of the nation's most demanding academic programs with high-level rugby isn't easy—but that's what makes Tech's players stand out. They're problem-solvers, engineers, thinkers, and doers—and they play like it.

It's not uncommon to hear commentators at national events take notice, praising Tech players for their grit, IQ, and relentless style of play.

Raising the Tech Rugby Flag

Nicholas Hutt and Akongnwi Chungong's selection is a testament not just to their individual talents—but to the work ethic and culture of Tech Rugby as a whole.

They've shown that our program is producing not only strong players, but well-rounded men ready for the next level—whether that's professional rugby or leadership beyond the pitch.

These guys didn't just show up at All-Stars. They made an impact—and they reminded the rugby world that Tech Rugby is here to stay.

Undefeated & Unstoppable: Tech Rugby's 2024 15s Season

What was expected to be a developmental year turned into a season beyond growth.

Tech Rugby stormed through the 2024 15s season undefeated, capturing the High Peaks Conference Championship and earning a spot in the National Sweet Sixteen. With a young squad—eight players making their 15s debut and two rookies learning the sport for the first time—this season was supposed to be about rebuilding. Instead, it became a showcase of resilience, and the grit that defines Tech Rugby.



From Warmup to Wake-Up Call

The season opened with a commanding win over in-state rivals University of New Mexico—a team Tech often uses as a “welcome to rugby” game for first-time players. UNM, still recovering from post-COVID decline, couldn’t hold up against Tech’s fresh legs and fast pace. But things ramped up quickly.

Tech’s conference opener took them to Colorado, where they faced University of Northern Colorado. The road trip turned into a statement game, as Tech dominated in every phase of play en route to a 52–0 shutout. The real test came early this year, when Colorado School of Mines—last year’s conference champs—traveled down to Socorro. With a stronger, more seasoned roster, CSM brought intensity, structure, and a high rugby IQ that pushed Tech to the brink.

Tech's defense faltered late, giving up two quick tries, but they held on in the final seconds. The scoreboard read 26–19, and Tech emerged battered but unbeaten.

COVID Comebacks & Conference Chaos

While Tech surged ahead, other programs across the conference were still finding their footing post-pandemic. Both Regis and Colorado College were forced to forfeit their scheduled matches due to low numbers and travel budget constraints—highlighting the uneven pace of recovery across collegiate rugby.

That left Tech just one win away from securing the High Peaks title—and the stars aligned for a storybook finish at home.

The Championship Clincher

University of Denver, coached by former USA Eagle Cody Melphy, came to Socorro with a strong pedigree. Just a few years ago, DU had taken Tech to the wire in the 15s National Championship game.

This time? Not even close.

Tech showed up with fire, focus, and a chip on their shoulder. They controlled the tempo from the opening whistle and ran away with a 36–17 victory, capping off a perfect 6-0 season and securing the 2024 High Peaks Conference Championship.



Adrain Sanchez (So), Seth Cowan (Fr), Leon Sutlov (Fr), Akongnwi Chungong (So), Adam Pacheco (So)

“This grit and tenacity really laid the bedrock for a bright future”
— Coach Jason

Sweet Sixteen Showdown in Oregon

Their undefeated conference title earned Tech a spot in the National Championship Sweet Sixteen in Monmouth, Oregon. First up: host team Western Oregon University.

In cold, wet conditions on artificial turf, Tech exploded for seven tries and left no doubt who belonged in the next round. A dominant performance silenced the home crowd and sent Tech surging into the national spotlight.

One Try Short

In the national quarterfinal, Tech faced again the top-tier Colorado team. It was a battle from start to finish, but Tech came up just four points short in a heartbreaking loss.

Conversion kicks left on the board and three key injuries—including two concussions and a pair of ankle sprains—took their toll late in the match. Still, the squad showed their heart, refusing to go down without a fight.

More Than a Season—A Statement

This season wasn't just about winning. It was about proving that Tech Rugby can reload, not just rebuild. With first-time players stepping up, veterans leading with passion, and rookies learning the game at a national level, the future of the program looks brighter than ever.

An undefeated conference run. A national playoff appearance. A team that learned, grew, and shocked the league.

2024 wasn't a rebuild year. It was a warning shot.

The Rise of Queens Rugby

When the spring semester kicked off at New Mexico Tech, most students returned from winter break easing back into class routines, coffee-fueled study nights, and campus life. But for a determined group of women on campus, January meant something different: rugby season was about to begin—and they were all in.

From just three players in the fall to a roster of 15 by spring, the New Mexico Tech Women's Rugby Team has done more than rebuild—they've roared back to life with passion, perseverance, and a whole lot of hustle.

Building Something From (Almost) Nothing

Just a few months ago, the women's rugby team was on the verge of fading away. With low numbers and limited resources, the future looked uncertain. But this spring changed everything.

"This season we created three themes—Sisterhood, Growth, and Resilience," said Coach Milaan Van Wyk, who took on the challenge of leading the women's squad for the first time. "These set the foundation for us to be successful this season—even if the results on the scoreboard weren't always in our favor."

Under Coach Van Wyk's leadership, the team hit the ground running in early February, training hard and recruiting even harder. What started as a small, dedicated group snowballed into a full-fledged team. Thirteen new players signed on, many with little to no athletic background, let alone experience in contact sports.

"Only four of the 15 who played this season had done another sport," Coach Van Wyk shared. "We had a few who played volleyball, soccer, even a cheerleader—but most of these girls were completely new to this level of physical sport."

Despite that, the team went all in—even staying over spring break to hold two-a-day practices and focus on fundamentals, fitness, and bonding.

Aleigha Romero, a Petroleum Engineering major from Bernalillo, NM, was one of those new recruits. A multi-sport athlete in high school, she was drawn to the team after a few girls invited her to a practice. "I did and Coach Milaan never let me leave," she laughed. What kept her coming back? "I like the family culture it created for me on campus, something I used as an 'out' in high school. It's a way to take a break from all the other things going on."



Desiree Richman, a double major in Biomedical Sciences and Mechanical Engineering, echoed a similar sentiment. “I was looking for something outside of school, something that let me be away from studying or in the lab,” she said. After learning about the team through a booth in the Fidel Center, she gave it a shot—and found much more than just a hobby. “The family aspect—we've created a sisterhood where we can help each other and have a resource for support. We get to be free from emotions. It's a release.”

Serena Richardson, a Business and Technical Communications student from Taos, NM, was one of the first to join last fall. “I saw my brother playing when I was in high school here at Tech, and I told myself when I got here I wanted to play,” she recalled. Helping grow the team from three to seventeen came with challenges. “Maintaining girls is hard when they show up and we only have three at practice,” she said. “So when we started to have more girls show up at once, we had a bigger commitment.”

Rugby, Recovery, and Resilience

This spring, the team competed in 7s rugby, a fast-paced, high-energy format of the sport. Over the course of the season, they played in three different tournaments, squaring off against seasoned programs like UNM, NMSU, UTEP, CSU, Colorado College, and Ciudad Juarez. The learning curve was steep—but the payoff was sweet. In their final tournament of the season, held in El Paso, the team went a perfect 3-0 to bring home a tournament win.

“It was amazing to see how far they came in just a few weeks,” Van Wyk said. “They learned how to take the results as lessons—not as failure—but more importantly, they created a sisterhood, which is rare on campus.”



The team embraced not just the game, but the recovery process too. From ice baths to pool day recoveries and film sessions, they trained like a veteran squad. Most impressive? Ten out of twelve of the players enrolled in the rugby class taught by Coach Jason, turning their on-field passion into academic enrichment.

Off the Pitch and Into the Community

Even with their packed schedule, the team has made giving back a priority. This semester, they volunteered at the local animal shelter, helping walk dogs and support caretakers. They also participated in a clean-up of California Street in Socorro and lent a hand at on-campus programs like the Macey Center Theater.

Recruitment, as always, was a hands-on effort. From tabling at the Sports Club Fair, to setting up booths in Fidel Center, to good old-fashioned flyer handouts, the team did everything they could to get the word out.

WOMEN'S RUGBY

Small Budget, Big Hustle

Like most club sports, the women's rugby team had to make do with limited resources. The Rec program provided a \$2,000 budget for the semester—barely enough to cover tournament fees, transportation, and basic supplies. So the team got creative.

They raised \$250 selling home-baked cookies and another \$880 through a homemade dinner plate sale—all organized, cooked, and promoted by the players themselves. That grassroots fundraising helped fill the gaps, but the need is still great.

“We really need new jerseys, athletic wear for practice, and more training balls,” Van Wyk said. “This program is just getting back on its feet. The foundation is here, but we need the support to keep building.”



Aleigha Romero (Fr), Shay Vanlandingham (So)



Serena Richardson (Fr), Evangeline Miranda (Fr)

Looking to the Future

For the fall 2025 season, they're looking to add five more players, which would allow them to play 15s rugby. They're also planning to arrive 1–2 weeks before the semester starts, just like the men's team, to get a head start on training and team-building.

Serena Richardson sees the future of the program as more than just wins and numbers. “It's a great support system. It's where I really made a lot of my true friends,” she said. “It's a great sisterhood.” When asked what she would say to alumni, she paused thoughtfully. “I would ask them how we can be successful outside of school—like, how do we as girls here at Tech be successful outside of the classroom?”

If you're a donor, alum, or supporter of NMT athletics, now is the time to get involved. The Women's Rugby Team is on the rise, but they need help—new equipment, training supplies, and funding for future tournaments.

You can make a donation directly through the school's Rec Sports program, or reach out to the team to sponsor gear, meals, or transportation.

Meet The Team



Shay Vanlandingham (So)
Socorro, NM
Business



Aleigha Romero (Jr)
Bernardo, NM
Petroleum Engineering



Sofia Moreno (Sr)
Bogotá, Columbia
Chemical Engineering



Zora Tolino-Minefee (Jr)
Albuquerque, NM
Environmental Science:
Geology Option



Tanya Navrotsky (Sr)
Socorro, NM
Biology



Jackelyn Hernandez (Jr)
Albuquerque, NM
Computer Science



Desiree Richman (So)
Deming, NM
Biomedical Sciences &
Mechanical Engineering



Karen Navrotcky (So)
Socorro, NM
Pre-Health Science:
Nursing



Serena Richardson (Fr)
Toas, NM
Business & Technical
Communications



Sofia Moores (Fr)
Albuquerque, NM
Civil Engineering

Players Not Present for Pictures:

Evangeline Miranda (Fr), Bernalillo, NM, Biomedical Science

Kaleena Essomba (Jr), Yaoundé, Cameroon, Biomedical Science

Delilah Villarreal (So), Rio Rancho, NM, Mechanical Engineering & Mathematics

Valentina Robledo (G), Medellin, Columbia, Mineral Engineering

Cassandra Ibarra (Sr), Albuquerque, NM, Psychology

PLAYER SPOTLIGHT DAVID VAQUERA

From the Pitch to the Classroom: How Rugby and Engineering Collide at NMT

When you think of the rugged terrain of Edgewood, New Mexico, and the academic rigor of New Mexico Tech, you might not immediately think rugby. But for one junior electrical engineering major, the sport has been a defining part of David Vaquera's college experience—both on and off the field. Originally drawn to Tech for its robotics programs—on the recommendation of a high school counselor—David began his journey in mechanical engineering. But after some time, he realized he wanted something more hands-on and made the switch to electrical engineering.

Back in high school, Vaquera was an All-State kicker for Moriarty High School's football team, so when he learned that Tech had a rugby team, he saw an opportunity to stay active and try something new. "I figured, why not?" Vaquera says. Since stepping onto the pitch, he's worn several hats—Scrumhalf, Fullback, and Winger—each requiring agility, vision, and a strategic mind. It's no surprise for someone balancing a heavy engineering course load.

His favorite moment so far? Traveling to Maryland for Nationals. "The environment there was incredible. You could feel it—being surrounded by the best of the best. It gives you a different kind of energy."



Vaquera speaks passionately about the culture of the NMT Rugby Club, describing it as a brotherhood closer than any other team he's played for. "Everyone lifts each other up. There's no blame game—it's all about supporting one another," he shares. That support system played a vital role, especially during Vaquera's freshman year. "Rugby helped me make friends and find guys I could go to for academic help. It made the transition to college a lot smoother."

Over the years, he's watched the team evolve and mature. "We're starting to understand who we are and how we play. There's a growing identity." One tradition Vaquera notes with a grin: Kangaroo Court—an informal, team-led way to hold each other accountable and share laughs in the process. And what fuels him after a hard-fought match? "Sofia's burritos. Cheap, easy, and perfect to take home."





Lunabotics Group in Florida

Off the Pitch: Lunabotics

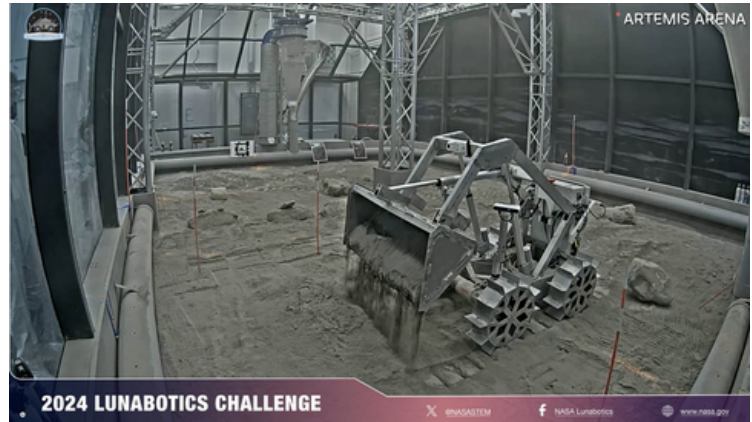
Outside of rugby, he also joined the Lunabotics team—working on a Mechanical Engineering Senior Milestone project that took him to Florida for NASA’s 2024 Lunabotics Challenge to simulate lunar environments. Out of dozens of teams nationwide, they were one of just 50 selected to compete. After advancing through the qualifying rounds at the University of Central Florida, the Tech team performed strongly enough to earn a spot in the Top 10—securing their place in the final two-day challenge held at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center.

Managing Tech’s academic intensity while committing to a high-impact sport like rugby isn’t easy, but it’s doable. His strategy? “Stay on top of coursework, ask for help, and don’t procrastinate. School comes first, then rugby.”

And surprisingly, the lessons flow both ways. “Communication on the pitch taught me how to reach out when I need help in class. That’s been key.”

While Vaquera doesn’t plan to play competitively after graduation, rugby will always have a place in his life. “I’ll definitely stay a fan—and continue supporting the college team any way I can.”

Reflecting on the future, he adds, “Rugby taught me life skills you don’t get from books. It’s a place where it’s okay to fail and learn. I’ve learned to find one thing to be grateful for every day. That’s all it takes.”



Live stream of competition from NASA’s website

A Shout-out to the Alumni

Support from alumni plays a vital role in this evolution. “They really come through for us—helping with travel, food, and financial support. It lets us focus on school and the game, instead of worrying about how we’re going to get there.”

To the alumni who paved the way, Vaquera offers a heartfelt thank you. “Your support—whether it’s financial, emotional, or just showing up—makes a huge difference.”

Alumni needing a driven, hardworking, trustworthy electrical engineer, NMT Rugby has what you need.

Alumni-Fueled and **7s** Battle Tested Tech Rugby Made Nationals Push

The New Mexico Tech Men's Rugby team capped off an exciting spring with a strong showing at the 2025 Collegiate Rugby Championship (CRC) in Boyds, Maryland—finishing 8th out of 16 elite programs nationwide. It was a tournament filled with grit, learning moments, and glimpses of serious potential for this up-and-coming squad.

Getting to the CRC wasn't a guarantee. After falling just short in the High Peaks Qualifier—dropping a hard-fought final to the University of Denver—Tech's path to nationals seemed uncertain. Fortunately, National Collegiate Rugby recognized the team's near-perfect spring record and extended one of its coveted “at-large” invitations. That, combined with generous support from alumni (thank you, Ancestors!), made the trip to Maryland a reality.

A Test of Character and Competition

The CRC was a significant step up in competition. Apart from Denver, most of Tech's spring matches were against local teams or clubs from outside the NCR system, meaning that the national tournament was the first time the boys saw consistent, high-level sevens opposition. And it showed.

The Techies opened with a gritty 10-5 win over Virginia Military Institute, showing resilience despite playing much of the match down a man due to yellow cards. From there, the tournament became a crash course in the unforgiving pace and tactical nuance of elite sevens rugby. Losses to top sides like Slippery Rock (last year's champions) and John Carroll highlighted the challenges of adapting a 15s-heavy style to the sevens format.

They closed out the weekend with another hard-fought match against Western Division rivals Cal Poly Humboldt, falling just short in a 10-5 defensive battle. Ultimately, the team left Maryland with valuable experience—and plenty to build on.



Learning Through Adversity

The CRC showed that Tech has the fitness, physicality, and rugby IQ to compete at the highest level. What they lacked was a pure sprinter or game-breaking finisher—something that becomes critical in the wide-open space of sevens. Still, the team never backed down, even when up against deeper, faster squads.

And perhaps more importantly, they grew as a unit. Playing under pressure, responding to setbacks, and supporting each other through a demanding tournament is what rugby culture is all about. These moments forge character as much as they reveal it.

“We looked like a fantastic 15s team playing the wrong code. The talent is there—we just need to keep sharpening the sevens skill set.”

-Coach Jason

To our alumni: your support made this season possible. From helping fund our national trip to sharing advice and encouragement, your involvement continues to fuel the success of NMT Rugby.

As this young squad evolves, they’re carrying on the tradition you helped build. We invite you to keep following the team, share your stories, and—if you’re ever nearby—come out and watch a match. This program is yours as much as it is theirs.



Looking Ahead: 15s, Fitness, and the Future

With the CRC behind them, the team has now fully shifted gears into 15s mode, diving into a two-week preseason training camp under Coach Oliphant’s performance-focused program. The emphasis this fall is on fitness, fundamentals, and forging a team identity that can carry through a long, competitive season.

Players are pushing through daily sessions filled with strength work, skills development, and tactical drills—laying the foundation for what’s shaping up to be an exciting year for Tech Rugby. The fall 15s season is just around the corner, and the squad is hungry to build on the momentum and lessons learned from their spring sevens campaign.

FACES OF GRADUATES



SOFIA MORENO

Degree: BS Chemical Engineering

Hometown: Bogota, Colombia

Position: Hooker

Why Rugby? “It was a nice way to distract myself after all the stress caused by school work or even personal problems. My way to find new friends and enjoy time outside of school”.

What’s next: Moreno is doing her accelerated Masters of Science in Chemical engineering at Tech.

JULIAN MARTINEZ

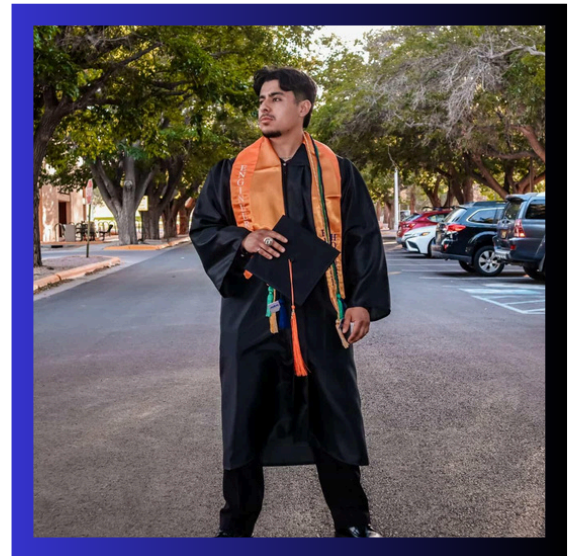
Degree: BS Mechanical Engineering

Hometown: Albuquerque, NM

Position: Center

How did rugby help you? “Rugby instilled discipline and resilience in me that made college more feasible. Same for work. It instilled a hunger to want to do better for myself in every aspect of life.”

What’s next: Julian now works for Los Alamos Labs as a graduate student in robotics.



NICHOLAS HUTT

Degree: MS Civil Engineering

Hometown: Albuquerque, NM

Position: Center

Why Rugby? “Rugby was everything for me. Gave me a community and opportunities that would have never happened...It was the whole reason I made it through tech. It provided me with a network of friends, mentors, and numerous amounts of hiring opportunities”.

What’s next: Nick now works for N3B in Los Alamos, working on Legacy Cleanup from Manhattan era.



ROBERT IVIL

Degree: BS Mechanical Engineering

Hometown: Rockland, Massachusetts

Position: Winger, Fullback

What has rugby taught you? “I’ve developed better teamwork skills that have carried over into my design team projects and group settings. Rugby has given me skills that can be applied off the pitch”.

What’s next: Robbie is staying at Tech for his ME in Mechanical and specialization in Explosives Engineering.

NATHANIEL SERDA

Degree: BS Physics, Minor Mathematics & Mechanical Engineering

Hometown: Albuquerque, NM

Position: Hooker, Flanker, Prop

How did rugby help you? “For work I think rugby helped me with discipline and work ethic. It also helped me with communicating with the people I work with”.

What’s next: Serda works at Applied Research Associates in Albuquerque, where he is a Junior Optical Engineer and main operator for telescope and sensors used for satellite tracking



GABRIEL BELTRAN

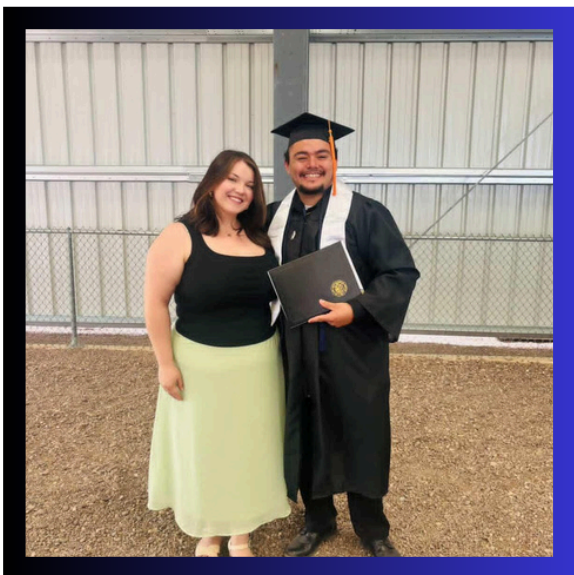
Degree: BS Material Science

Hometown: Albuquerque, NM

Position: Prop

Why Rugby? “Rugby gave me a community since day one and allowed me to integrate into Tech knowing I had people to lean on...a way for me to stay focused on something other than my course work which helped from getting burnt out.”.

What’s next: Gabe is finishing his masters thesis in materials. He’s studying the dynamics of Carbon Dioxide capture with specialized Metal Organic Frameworks for direct air capture.



WOMENS RUGBY



AWAY

SF10S

SUN 31ST
AUGUST



COLORADO SCHOOL OF
MINES

AWAY

MINES

SAT 27TH
SEPTEMBER



HOME

NMSU

SAT 4TH
OCTOBER



U.S. AIR FORCE

HOME

AIR FORCE

SAT 11TH
OCTOBER



AWAY

DENVER

SAT 1ST
NOVEMBER

700TH

MENS RUGBY



HOME
CO. COLLEGE
SAT 20TH
SEPTEMBER



HOME
49ERS
FRI 17TH
OCTOBER



AWAY
MINES
SAT 27TH
SEPTEMBER



AWAY
DENVER
SAT 1ST
NOVEMBER

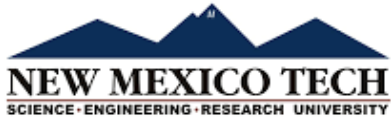


HOME
NORTHERN
SAT 11TH
OCTOBER



HOME
WESTERN
SAT 8TH
NOVEMBER

FALL SCHEDULE



New Mexico Institute
of Mining and Technology
801 Leroy Place
Socorro, NM 87801

www.nmt.edu/advancement

www.nmt.edu/advancement/rugby_alumni.php

