

# Alberta attitude revives Canadian rugby

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Edmonton became Canada's capital city of rugby on Sunday with the appointment of Roger Smith as president of Rugby Canada at the national body's general meeting in Winnipeg.

The local lawyer joins first-year national men's coach Ric Suggitt of Edmonton and newly appointed women's team coach Neil Langevin of Lethbridge as Albertans who have filled high-profile jobs with the rebuilding organization.

"That's a rumour that's out there: people are asking, 'how is Alberta getting all this stuff?'" said Smith, a former

## Edmontonians hold high-profile national positions

Rugby Canada secretary and president of both the Alberta and Edmonton rugby unions. "I think partly it's that Albertans have a can-do attitude and do stuff rather than talk about it."

For Rugby Canada, which had been mired in debt and infighting for several years leading up to the 2003 Rugby World Cup, it is the latest in a series of moves that focus outside of the sport's traditional bases in B.C. and southern Ontario.

Stagnating in the world rankings at No. 13, Canada managed a single victory at the last World Cup.

Now, however, the organization seems poised to take steps forward with

some encouraging results on the field, a brighter financial picture, and a single-minded approach in the boardroom.

"We're a business and in a few years we've moved a long way towards making business decisions," said Smith.

The 40-year-old commercial lawyer helped transform the annual Churchill Cup tournament from a money losing, non-event in Vancouver, where 2003 attendance barely broke 1,000, into a financial success at Commonwealth Stadium with a Canadian record crowd for rugby of 14,000 and an international television audience.

See RUGBY / D4

## RUGBY

Continued from D1

"(With Churchill) we're building a model for how to properly run international fixtures and events and exporting that around the country," said Smith, who added that Canada's test versus France last July pulled in 9,000 people at York University in Toronto and netted \$75,000.

The organization is now running a slight profit and is set to retire its debt in 2006, following payment of nearly \$250,000 in the past several years.

It's a long way from the squabbling between players and the board over resources which resulted in the firing of former head coach David Clark in 2001.

The senior team has usually relied on the good nature of Canadians who play professionally in Europe, a system that has led to tension under the strain of a tight budget.

Following a player strike, Clark was rehired by a new board under president Pat Parfrey, whom Smith replaces.

"What happens off the field affects what's on the field," said Suggitt, who



BRUCE EDWARDS, THE JOURNAL, FILE

Local lawyer Roger Smith was named president of Rugby Canada on Sunday.

was named national men's coach program director in January, specifically to mesh development teams and professionals who shown a renewed interest in the program.

"We were at a point where there was a struggle between what the players wanted and what was available from the board," said Suggitt.

"I think we're past that point.

"There's no denying my friendship with Roger," added Suggitt, who coached Edmonton's Clansmen Rugby Club when Smith was club president in 1994.

"What you see is what you get with Roger, and he'll work hard to progress the sport of rugby and work behind the scenes to get athletes what they need."

High-profile flanker Dan Baugh, another Clansman now on injury leave with the Cardiff Blues, is one of several professionals who are planning to join the team when it tours Europe in the fall.

The Canadians will meet No. 11 Italy in Rome and No. 3 England at Twickenham in early November.

No. 7 Wales will visit Canada next summer and Edmonton will again host the Churchill Cup in 2005, before the rotating tournament is optioned to the United States.

The next version of the three-nation tournament will take place entirely in Edmonton, while organizers have dropped the women's side of the tournament, largely for financial reasons.

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