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Sabrina Polin
Roger Williams University

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‘Blood Brothers’ Trade a Day of Practice for a Day of Donation

RWU’s Men’s Lacrosse Team donates blood together for the fifth year

BRISTOL, R.I. – For the second time this school year, the mighty men of Roger Williams University’s Men’s Lacrosse team put down their sticks and sacrificed a valuable day of practice, opting instead to lay in bed – but just long enough for their blood to be drawn.

Head Coach Marty Kelly has been coaching at RWU for 14 seasons, and this is the fifth year he has organized an effort for the entire team to donate blood. It began as a simple way to give back to the community, but evolved into something even more meaningful.

“This was just something we came across that was an easy, one-day thing beneficial to those in need, but it was also kind of a team building exercise,” Kelly says. “Some of the guys were excited, but a lot were nervous and fearful, so [donating blood] was like a badge of courage.”

In years past, the team would travel to Providence to donate at the Rhode Island Blood Center in order to accommodate the number of players donating at once – typically 20-25 team members. This fall and spring, however, the team attended the blood drives at the RWU North Campus Residence Hall. In both situations, the phlebotomists at the drives were incredibly grateful – but not without challenges.

“Usually it’s pretty fun for the workers,” Kelly says. “They worry about fitting everyone in, but ultimately they love to see big groups come in, and they’re always asking about the team.”

And while Kelly was never an avid donor before beginning the team donation tradition, senior captain Patrick Holland is something of an all-star. On top of donating with the team every year, Holland has also been donating blood at least once a year since he reached the donor age requirement.

“When I donate, I don’t think about making a difference necessarily, I just think it’s a good thing and it’s important to help those in need,” says Holland, a public relations major.
Holland, too, sees the impact donating together has on the team. They may get a day off from practice, but they don’t get a day off from each other.

“Going as a team definitely helps with the team unity,” Holland says. “I know for those who are donating for the first time it can be nerve wracking. Doing it in a team environment is more supportive and brings us together.”

Donating blood as a team always comes with some challenges, according to Kelly. It’s difficult to coordinate schedules; health issues may prevent a team member from donating; and fears may cause teammates to be apprehensive about it.

Holland says that every year, one particular teammate always ends up fainting while getting his blood taken, and though they may chuckle to make light of the situation, it’s always a little scary to see him go down.

By donating every year, the lacrosse team (sometimes serving as up to 40 donors) saves countless lives, strengthens their team relationship and debunks fears and stigmas that players may have had.

Roger Williams has partnered with the Rhode Island Blood Center for 35 years, and was the organization’s first donor site. Kelly says he is proud of the team’s contribution and he plans to continue the team tradition in future seasons.

For more information on blood donation, or to schedule an appointment, visit www.ribc.org.