

# Keepa Making an Impact on Titans

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Red Deer Titans Rugby Club new head coach John Keepa has an interesting philosophy when it comes to coaching rugby.

The 49-year-old native of New Zealand believes you take bits and pieces from a number of sports and apply them to rugby when building a program.

“What I do when I’m training is take the techniques from a number of sports and apply them to rugby,” he said. “Even cheerleading. When I was coaching girls in the States I mentioned that the lifting in cheerleading helps in line-outs in rugby.

“Sumo wrestling, for example, is good for being strong in close contact. Every sport has something to give and visa versa.”



He also believes that just because he’s from New Zealand that he doesn’t have to teach strictly ideas from his home country.

“Not at all,” he said. “I believe you can take the strengths from a number of countries like the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia and use them in your training.”

Keepa is from the North Island in New Zealand and grew up playing a number of sports, but admits rugby was always in his blood. He is a qualified personal trainer and got into coaching “four or five” years ago.

“I come from a fitness background and advanced to the technical side,” he explained.

“But I’ve always been involved in the sport in one way or another from playing to management to coaching.”

A year ago he decided to take to the road and worked with a number of programs in the United States. He was with a university in Nashville, Tenn., when he first made a trip to Red Deer.

“I was in contact with Red Deer off and on and they offered me an opportunity to run a clinic in February and it just progressed from there,” said Keepa, who is interested in working with more non-rugby countries, such as Canada and the United States.

“I see both countries as being real sleepers when it comes to the sport,” he said. “Both are very competitive and have a lot of talent and knowledge.”

Keepa was definitely impressed with the Titans facilities.

“The city of Red Deer should be proud,” he said. “It’s an outstanding facility with two fields and a club house.”

Keepa arrived in Red Deer last week and will coach the men’s first and third division teams and work with the women’s program if needed.

“I don’t consider the men as first and third division teams rather an A team and a developmental team,” said Keepa. “I think the players should have the flexibility to change teams if need be. I also believe both teams should run the same systems so there is no change if players move up or down. As well it would be great if the women has the same system as well.”

The women’s team, which plays in the premier division, is coached by Bill Bowd.

Keepa is still learning the names and positions of the players, but that may be good he says.

“I can come in and make a decision on where they fit the best. Maybe it will be different than where they played before, who knows. It’s not a personal thing but a logical decision.”

Keepa will get a chance to see the men’s teams in action Saturday as they open league play in Calgary against the Canucks.

The women see their first action May 9 in Edmonton against the Druids.

The Titans first division team opens at home May 23 against St. Albert while the women play at home May 30 against the Rockers.