

## Dec. 26 College Rugby

### Hamilton graduate Rossi finding rugged rugby lifestyle to her liking at Pitt

*This story originally appeared in the December Hamiltonian newspaper*

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

**Dec. 26:** So there she was, Amanda Rossi, walking to her class as a freshman at the University of Pittsburgh.

You remember Amanda Rossi. Excellent goalie and big-time rebounder for the Hamilton West girls' soccer and basketball teams?

So of course, with that kind of background, it's no wonder that when Panthers women's rugby club coach Tim Bagatti first laid eyes on Rossi that day, he intercepted her before she got to class.

"He just stopped me and told me that I had to come out and play," Rossi said. "I guess because I'm (6-foot 2-inches) tall and built, he thought I would be a good player because of my height."

And so, a career was born in Western Pennsylvania. Rossi is a sophomore forward for Pitt's "Team Sexxy."

"I don't know who came up with that name, but we own it," Rossi said with a laugh.

If winning is sexy, then Pitt is living up to its name.

Although it is a club sport and not part of the NCAA, Pittsburgh plays some high level competition around the country. It went undefeated this season and was the ARU Division champion. That qualified Team Sexxy for the Midwest Regional Tournament in Wisconsin, which resulted in a second-place finish (out of 16 teams).

By virtue of a top-two finish, Pitt has advanced to the Women's College Division II national championship in late April. The site has not been announced but Rossi said "I'm hoping for California!" The nationals consist of 16 teams and is a single-elimination tournament.

Pitt currently sits at 9-1 and is ranked eighth nationally among women's Division II teams. Last year Team Sexxy got beat in the second-round of the regionals and lost one of their key forwards, but Rossi noted that numerous players stepped up in this season's drive to nationals.

Count the sophomore from Hamilton West as one of them, as she has thrived in a blue collar sport in a blue collar town.

In rugby, a score is called a "try", which awards a team five points. After each try, two additional points can be scored by kicking the ball through the uprights, much like a football extra point.

Playing as a second row forward, Rossi has collected five tries this season. As second row, she is also responsible for lifting teammates in the air on throw-ins. At 6-2, Rossi provides a pretty good lift.

And while Team Sexxy's name affirms its femininity, the members have no problem awarding the "Man of the Match" award after each contest.

Rossi is proud to say "I got it three times this season."

Not bad for someone who knew more about the feeding habits of fish in the Gulf of Mexico than she did about rugby before college.

"I had no idea what rugby was about," Rossi said. "I knew it was a rough sport so I thought I



*Amanda Rossi puts a hit on an opponent during Pitt's fall season.*

would be fine because I played goalie in high school and that got rough sometimes, but its nothing like any sport I've ever played before."

After her first few experiences, there weren't enough famed Primanti Brothers' sandwiches in the Steel City to take away the pain.

"After my first practice my body ached but after my first game it was horrible," she said. "My first game was in the 20-degree Pittsburgh weather. It was one of three that day cause we were in a tournament.

"After the third game I was just really sore but I didn't think much of it, but after an hour drive back to school I couldn't get out of the car. My legs were so bruised they were purple, I had cleat marks up and down my legs, I had a black eye, and a busted lip."

Great! So one must assume she hates rugby and plays it anyway.

Wrong.

"I personally enjoy the sport because of the thrill it gives," she said. "I just love everything about the sport."

She better enjoy it. Between practice, weight lifting/conditioning and games, Rossi is on the pitch six days a week.

"It's really intense and time consuming but it's worth every minute of it," she said.

And when they are not playing rugby, members of Team Sexxy are watching it.

"We all get together and watch games that come on our TV," Rossi said. "My whole team likes Ireland so I cheer for them as well."

While rugby has become a way of life for Rossi, there were some strange looks back in Hamilton when she first mentioned what sport she had adopted.

"I knew she was always one to try something new," said Rowan freshman soccer player Victoria Camera, who played soccer and basketball with Rossi at West. "But when I found out she was playing at first I was shocked. I didn't even know anyone who played rugby.

"After a few days I thought this was a sport she could definitely have fun with. I saw her over Thanksgiving and I'm glad she's happy at Pitt and with the sport she's playing."

Camera's initial reaction was pretty much the norm.

"Most of my friends were shocked when I told them," Rossi said. "I got a lot of weird looks and two questions – 'Why would you ever want to play rugby?' and 'Do you wear pads?'"

"When I tell them that the only protection we wear is a mouth guard I get even more shocked and concerned looks. They say 'So you basically play football without pads?'"

And when she says yes?

"Mainly people think it's really cool," Rossi said. "Or they think I'm totally insane."