

WOMEN'S RUGBY AUSTRIA

Women's 7's Rugby Championship Graz 10 September 2011

Saturday 10 September marked the season opener for Women's Rugby in Austria. Originally set to take place in Klagenfurt alongside the men, the tournament was relocated to Graz shortly before as the men's tournament. Graz quickly stepped up and spontaneously organised to host and thus save the day for the women who were ready to play no matter what.

The season opener brought together Graz, Innsbruck, Vienna and Slovakia. This was the first tournament of our Bundesliga that the Slovakian team participated in having recently joined the league and already added a bit of fresh blood and diversity to the group. Krems and Melk were unable to send complete teams this early in the season, however sent highly motivated players to help complete the Innsbruck side, who were also struggling.

The morning started with Graz facing off against Vienna. Through their typical fast hands and playing to the outside Vienna started strong and breeding by Graz for a shut put win. The game ended 59-0 for the team from Schönbrunn.

On a very tight schedule the games continued one immediately after the other. The second match of this sunny rugby day saw Innsbruck go against the Slovakian new comers. Unaware of their playing style, Innsbruck did their best to show their strength right away and start strong. Struggling with ball handling in the beginning Innsbruck started to get back into their rugby stride finding the ball to the outside, as well as using their forwards strength. The game resulted in an Innsbruck win, 34-5.

A five minute break following that game Slovakia stayed on the field to go head to head with Graz. Seemingly equal in strength both teams struggled with forward momentum, cancelling each other out on several drives, however in the second half Graz was able to pull together, gaining speed and ending up winning over our new friends from Slovakia, 15-5.

Innsbruck and Vienna then took the field, one of the oldest rivalries in Women's Rugby Austria. Vienna's speed counter-acted Innsbruck's strength and tackling finding the holes and using them to their advantage. Innsbruck was at a disadvantage from not having their full squad and not having a great deal of time to practice together yet this season and it showed resulting in Innsbruck's first defeat of the day 35-0.

Innsbruck then stayed on the field to take on Graz. Both teams were noticeably affected by the long, hot day, however concentrated after their loss against Vienna, Innsbruck was able to regroup and use their ball handling and strength to power though the Graz defence. Innsbruck finished the day strong with a win 33-7.

The tournament ended with the Schönbrunn team playing a challenging match against our new Slovakian friends. The Slovakian team definitely improved immensely throughout the course of the tournament as can be seen by comparing the scores. Schönbrunn won the match 29-0.

After a successful season opener in Graz a friendly 10's match was played mixing the 4 teams to form two: Vienna/Slovakia and Innsbruck/Graz. 10 a side has been in the cards for a few years now but has only been possible one time before a few years back. Adding a friendly match at the end of an official tournament day is not always possible when there is a full day of women's and men's league tournament matches. For many of the players 10's was a new but interesting form of rugby with 10 players on the field, as the name implies, not only adding a player to the back line, but also adding 2 players to the scrum creating a 5 person scrum, which some men have been known to say is almost a real scrum. The introduction of 10's seems to have proven successful as interest in more friendly 10's has now been sparked among the 5 Austrian teams and the Slovakian one. It will be interesting to see how 10's rugby will progress in the emerging rugby nation of Austria and in the neighbouring countries.

Thank you to Graz for the quick organization after Klagenfurt had to be cancelled, thanks to the referees who also adapted short notice and did a wonderful job, and welcome to our league to Slovakia. On 8 October the fun will continue and will mark the second Austrian league fixture of the season for the women and it will once again take place in Graz.