

OVER THE CROSSBAR

Rugby a game for everyone

BY CHRISTON SANDY

The **UWI Rugby Club** is one of the elders of the sport clubs at the University, and this year, the Club celebrates 90 years since its inception.

It is a sport that is almost 200 years old, and still, it invokes mixed feelings. Some people think it as an intensely brutal sport. Maria Thomas, a seasoned member of the **UWI Rugby** team, insists that there are rules to manage this.

"In rugby, safety... and overly violent tackles are dealt with very seriously by referees," she says.

Although people are sceptical about their suitability for the game's toughness, Maria says that once they understand it, they realise that in rugby, there are positions for everyone.

"It is not necessarily a matter of being the biggest and strongest. There are some positions that require faster, more agile, persons. You need to understand and respect the level of intensity that rugby is played with. However," she adds, "once you learn the skills properly, you protect yourself and are less likely to get injured, as with any sport."

Maria, who is a national female rugby player and Honorary Secretary of the Trinidad and Tobago Rugby Football Union (TTRFU), spent years playing numerous sports at the University of Western Ontario in Canada, while studying for her Degree in Anthropology with a Specialization in Sociocultural Studies. She reminisced happily about her initial training days with the **UWI Rugby Club** during the vacation period until she became a permanent member following her migration to Trinidad.



Her passion for rugby can be seen in her volunteer work as a coach in several developmental camps throughout the country, as well as in her contributions towards the development of the sport at The **UWI**. Last year, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed between the TTRFU and The **UWI**. She said the MOA will provide more opportunities for the game to be played within the University, and strengthens the support from the TTRFU in the assistance of officiating, and player and coaching development. The agreement also gives The **UWI** an opportunity to play against international teams, which ensures that **UWI** players are granted the highest level of exposure.

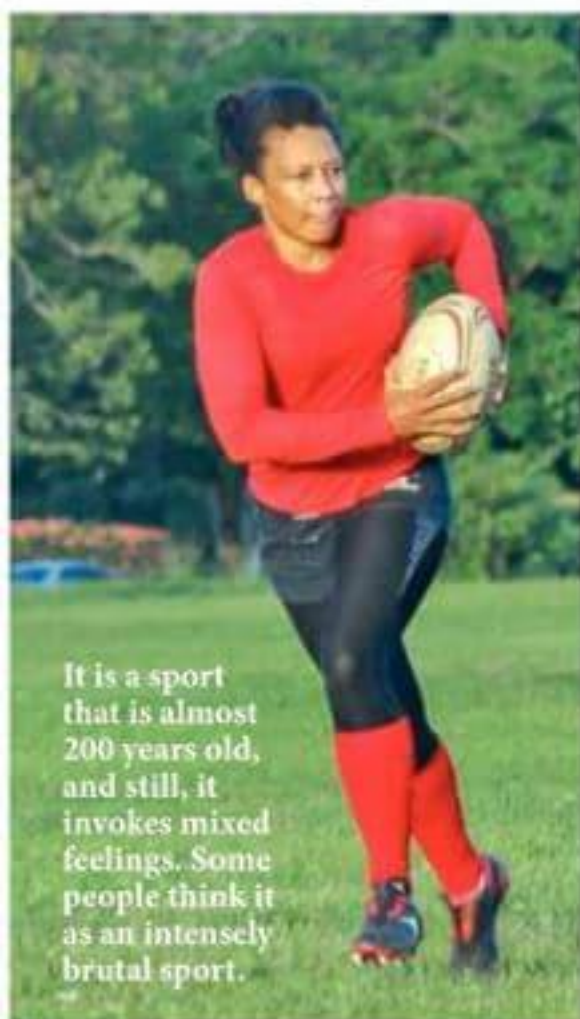
On November 18 and 19, 2017, the second annual Professor Clement Sankat Challenge 7's Trophy competition takes place. (It was named after the former Principal of the **UWI St. Augustine Campus**.)

Maria hopes that the Campus community and the public will be attracted to the sport to experience what she has labelled as "one big family," highlighting the levels of sportsmanship beyond the playing field. She remembered the moments the **UWI Rugby** family helped her get through times of hardships and says that "beyond me coming to training and games they really looked out for me, even those who are not involved in **UWI Rugby** any more still keep an eye out for me."

Maria started playing rugby when she was 18. She overcame a career-threatening knee injury that took her out of the game for three years and went on to play for the national team.

She hopes to recruit many students for the **UWI Rugby** team this year and urges persons to go for it.

"There will always be obstacles both in life in sport but just give it your best shot."



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New Director of Sport



Olympian Grace Jackson is the new Director of Sport at the St. Augustine Campus. PHOTO: ALLAN V. CRANE

Jamaican Olympian Grace Jackson has been appointed Director of Sport at The **UWI St. Augustine Campus** effective September 30, 2017.

A celebrated track and field athlete, Ms. Jackson won silver in the 200m at the 1988 Seoul Olympics Games and competed in the 1984, 1988 and 1992 Olympic Games. She also won gold in the 4x400m relay at the 1989 World Games.

She was Jamaica's Sports Woman of the Year in 1986 and 1988. In 1989 she was awarded the Order of Distinction (OD) by the Government of Jamaica.

Ms. Jackson was formerly at The **UWI Mona** where she held the position of Sports Development Director from 2010. Before this, she served as Student Services and Development Manager, Sports from 1998 to 2009 also at the Mona Campus. She graduated with a BA in Accounting from Alabama, Agricultural and Mechanical University in 1982 and then completed a MA in Computer Science at Queens College in 1987. In 2007, she graduated from the United States Sports Academy, Mobile Alabama with a Master of Sports Science and Sports Management.

"I am no stranger to The **UWI** and when I consider advancements at the institution like the establishment of the Faculty of Sport I am pleased with the high priority we are placing on the discipline. It's a good time to take up a leadership position in sport at The **UWI** and I look forward to making a significant contribution," she said, commenting on her new appointment.

Ms. Jackson has been a regular commentator and analyst on television and radio since 1992 and has acted as lead analyst on athletics at the Olympic level for ESPN Caribbean.

She follows Major David Benjamin who was appointed Director of Sport in 2014 and demitted office earlier this year.