Canton Rugby Football Club
Letter from Club President Jason Doyle
April 9th, 2023

Dear members,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their continued support of the Canton Rugby Club. As I type this, I am filled with conflicting emotions. One of pride for being named President of Canton Rugby for the 2023 year, but also one of sadness as I wish my friend Dan was still available to lean on for advice and inspiration. But nonetheless, we all know that he is proud of what we have done thus far, and what we have planned to continue his dream of growing our club into a statewide and nationally recognized program. Let's continue to set the bar higher every day, as we *go forward* together and *be there* for each other.

I would also like to thank the executive committee for the hard work they have put in during our "down time". I assure you we are committed to maintaining the great traditions and legacies of the predecessors of Canton Rugby. This places a great responsibility on all of us to ensure that we hand over our club to the next generation in as good condition, if not better, than that which we inherited. Our plans include a restructuring of the constitution to ensure that every entity of this club has the full support of leadership needed for individual success. This plan does not come to fruition without the support of membership, and we will make sure that all the members are informed of all our plans.

Whether you played rugby for years or have only recently been introduced to the sport, the sense of belonging to a worldwide community is real, and it will stay with you throughout your life. When you join the ever-growing squad of rugby fans around the world, you get the opportunity to be part of one of the strongest fraternities and sororities in the world. Wherever you travel, locally or around the globe, you will find you have rugby friends and supporters everywhere. And when we combine the joy of playing rugby with an emphasis on commitment, respect, sportsmanship, and that strong sense of community, then we can make a difference in the lives of so many.

As players and fans travel from all over to attend youth, high school, and adult matches in Canton this year, always remember the legacy that has been built and this future we aspire towards. Enjoy the weekends with friends (new and old) and family. Work hard on the pitch and enjoy your time off it. Be safe and considerate of your teammates, opponents, match officials and your surroundings so that people leave Canton feeling they were welcome, and that they enjoyed their experience. We must all strive to be a positive part of this year's rugby gatherings as we continue to build a solid foundation for Canton Rugby.

We would like to wish our flag teams the best of luck as they open their season on April 19th at Jackson High School for round robin competition. We are proud to announce that we have added two new teams this year, Jackson and North Canton. They will join Canton and Perry in the Canton Rugby Youth Flag League for the 2023 spring season. The creation of these teams will lead to future growth in their respective districts and should encourage neighboring districts to jump on the rugby bandwagon as well.

We also want to wish the middle school teams safe travels and good luck to them as they travel to Dublin on April 15th for their second set of matches of their season. Dover and Perry are both fielding two boys sides each, and Perry is fielding three girls sides this spring. We are excited to see them take on other competition this weekend so they can set an expectation for how they need to compete when it comes time for state championships in May. We are looking for great things out of our teams this spring.

On the high school front, we are disappointed to have run into roadblocks within certain school systems when it comes to recruiting and fielding teams. We will continue our work to show these school districts how a rugby program would benefit their student athletes. Meanwhile, we wish for the best for our local high school teams, the Perry Panther boys, and the Perry Panther girls, who absorbed any players from local area schools that wished to play, but didn't have a home team. Both Perry teams have seen great wins and tough losses already but are looking to keep their momentum rolling as they get back to action after their break for the holiday weekend. Each team boasts a solid 25 person roster, and they are ready to get back out on the pitch for more success. We want them to be hitting on all cylinders when the playoffs begin towards the end of May. We are also proud to say that at the time of this letter, just this year we have had 6 of our local high school athletes sign letters of intent to play rugby at the collegiate level, with a few more still to come once they make their final decisions.

I am glad to share some very encouraging adult news, the Canton Women's team is happening this year! With some scrimmages, matches and tournaments in the works, these ladies will be showing off their rugby talents soon. We had a strong showing of new recruits and veterans at the indoor clinics, and our numbers continue to grow at outdoor practices as well. The Canton Women are practicing on Monday and Thursday from 6:00-8:00pm at Weis Park. Please send any recruits information to Head Coach Ben Karam at 330-209-0881. As I said in their group chat… Let's get this Lady Maddog train rolling!

After a successful fall 2022 season for the Canton Mens team, we are happy to say that we have been promoted to DIII for the fall of 2023. This means a higher level of competition, and a higher level of commitment needed from our men. This has already happened here in the spring, as we have now seen the number of players at practice in the upper 20's. We welcome the return of any veteran players from any team, as long as they are committed to play Maddog rugby, and pay their dues and cipp accordingly. I am proud of what we have done to rebuild the men's team, and I am honored that these players felt comfortable reaching out to current leadership, asking to return to their Canton roots and play in their hometown again. I realize that this has brought on mixed emotions from teammates, leadership and supporters on both sides, but our best approach is to work through this transition as a team, working together to get past our differences to make us stronger. We also welcome any new players to the team, and we have plenty of experienced players who can help introduce the sport to the rookies. As we continue to grow the men's team with spring friendlies and summer sevens, we will be in discussions with the Midwest to make sure we get all our players plenty of time on the pitch in the fall. Whether we get B side matches or enter a DIII and a DIV side is still up in the air, but we will do everything in our power to make sure it works out for every single one of our players. Keep putting in the work at practice together, and we will "come out of nowhere" to light up the other teams in our division during league competition.

To our volunteers throughout the club, I would like to express my sincere gratitude. I applaud you for your passion, dedication and innovation that continues to grow and develop the sport of rugby and I look forward to working alongside you all this year. We will continue to strive to offer our players the very best opportunities that time and space will allow. We will work as hard as we can off the pitch to guarantee you a great time on the pitch. But as you can see our club continues to grow and with that comes the need for additional volunteers across all areas. If you have a spare hour or two to dedicate to the growth of rugby in Canton, please do step forward and let us know. As the old saying goes "many hands make light work". And as is the case in rugby, all skillsets are welcome. There is plenty to go around both on and off the pitch, so please get involved. You won't regret it!

In closing, I am asking all of you to set a goal of getting to know the people of this club on a more personal level, and certainly don't take someone else's opinion of a person as your own. This is the best way to connect and bond as a team, and it will set us apart from the rest. In the end, we will realize that we are all high-quality people, with the common goal of playing high-quality rugby for a high-quality club. And we all play an important role in continuing the long-standing tradition that is Canton Rugby.

Thank you. Have a great holiday and see you soon.

Jason Doyle
Canton Rugby Club President