

## 2nd & goal!

Portland women's football team tackles its second season

BY JAMIE BOLYARD

Get this: Portland has its very own women's football team. And I'm not talking flag football or "Powder Puff." I'm talking about the real deal—full-contact tackle football.

The Portland Shockwave, now in its second season, is part of the Independent Women's Football League, a member organization of team owners similar to the National Football League. The league was founded in 2000 to support women's tackle football and now has more than 20 teams throughout the United States and Canada.

The Shockwave are in the Pacific Northwest Division of the Western Conference alongside Oregon's other two teams, the Eugene Edge and Corvallis Pride. The Tacoma Majestics and Boise Xtreme are also in the division.

Four lifelong female athletes own the Shockwave—two lesbian, one bi and one straight. Founding owners Emily Schwartz and Rebecca Dawson heard about the Tacoma team in the fall of 2001 and were instantly intrigued. Although neither had a football background, they fell in love with the idea of women playing tackle football and decided to start their own team. (And why not?)

Dawson wears two helmets—she's the owner and the team's starting running back. Schwartz calls herself a "girlie volleyball player" and leaves the playing to the 47 women who fill the Shockwave roster.

Rounding out the ownership team are lesbian partners Megan Townsend and Rebecca

Brisson. Townsend plans to try out for the team next season; Brisson is the Shockwave's starting wide receiver.

Brisson loves football. The daughter of a high school football coach, she grew up on the gridiron. She played flag football in the sixth grade and was asked the following year to play on the regular team.

"I got teased enough," she says. "I wasn't about to go play real football with the boys. I regret that, but now I get a chance."

Most Shockwave players joined the team with less experience or knowledge. "A few people had no clue that a football was oblong," Brisson laughs.

Most team members grew up fans of the game, but Brisson says it's totally different the first time you put on the pads. "Some people are as mean as shit and can go out there and hit someone like no one's business. Other people become more timid, and they get scared. It's something we work through."

Obviously the kinks were worked out well before the first game. In 2002 the Shockwave defense rated among the Top 25 in the country, out of nearly 120 teams. They also finished

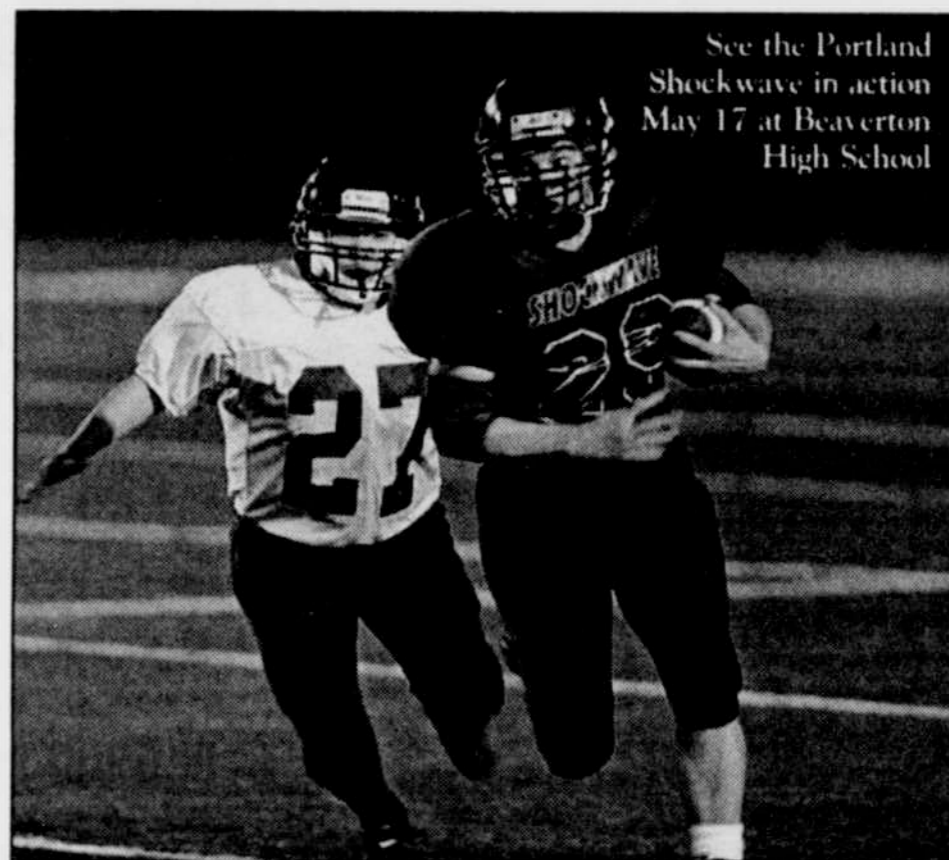
second in the league last year, losing to Tacoma in the championship game.

Great records aside, unlike their male counterparts, these women play simply for the love of the game. The players are individually subcontracted under the condition that until there's a profit, they don't get paid.

The Shockwave relies on grassroots marketing such as handing out fliers and holding occasional fund-raisers, including a recent auction at the Egyptian Club. "Financially, I still don't know how we make it happen every year," says Schwartz. "With almost zero corporate sponsorship or advertising and banks unwilling to loan money to such a risky business venture, making it all come together is difficult."

Most of the team's support comes from women, their families and the lesbian community. Brisson estimates membership is around 60 percent lesbian.

Unlike some professional women's sports teams that have been criticized for ignoring their lesbian fans and players, the Shockwave welcome all. "We highlight talent and hard work, no matter who is doing it," Schwartz asserts. "If America doesn't yet understand or isn't ready for



See the Portland Shockwave in action May 17 at Beaverton High School

PHOTO BY SCOTT W. LARSON

the fact that we are a melting pot for a reason, that can't be helped. There is no shame in acknowledging that part of the reason one of our star players is able to shine on the field is because she has the support of a wife and kids at home."

As for those fans, Townsend sums it up quite simply: "Look at all the people who supported the Fire—they have nowhere to go. They need to come to our games." □

Your next chance to root for the PORTLAND SHOCKWAVE is 6 p.m. May 17, when they take on the Eugene Edge on their home turf at Beaverton High School, 13000 S.W. Second St. Admission is \$3-\$5; kids 12 and younger are free. For a season schedule visit [www.portlandshockwave.com](http://www.portlandshockwave.com).

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Owners Emily Schwartz (right) and Megan Townsend keep a sharp eye plays

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