

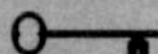


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Little-Known Facts

About Women Warriors in History #4:

In A.D. 39, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi led a Vietnamese uprising against the Chinese. They gained control of 65 citadels and reigned as queens until A.D. 43. Their mother, Tran Thi Doan, trained them in military skills and led troops to support them. Phung Thi Chinh also took part in the battles of A.D. 43 and delivered her child at the battlefield.

In the corner, Anna "Tank" Tankersley does hurdler stretches. She is 19, 5-foot-3 and 190 pounds. Her nickname is well-earned; she is built just like—well, you get it. She can bench 200 pounds, squat 375 pounds and power clean 110 pounds. The youngest team member, Tankersley has a mop of wavy brown hair and nearly bursts with energy. She describes a life in high school where she could compete in softball and track and field events, but things ended there. Her brothers played football while she was relegated to the sidelines.

Tankersley likes to hit hard—"hard as the men," she says. Mostly, however, she loves football "for the competitiveness of it." Tankersley, who is straight, played Powderpuff Football one year. "This is better," she's quick to add. "In our league you can really clobber someone."

Tankersley's mother didn't want her to get hurt. What mother doesn't want her kid to be safe though, right? It's the universal prerogative of all mothers to lament the safety of their offspring—and, as these women transition past parental concern and hit the gridiron, they reach a new zenith of self-awareness and find a new kind of inner strength.

Brisson helps explain. "When I tell someone I play football, they always respond, 'You mean flag football, right?' And I tell them, 'No, I play full-contact football,' and their eyes light up." She adds, "The next question is always, 'Do you get hurt?' and my answer is, 'Of course we do!'"

I take an inventory of injuries, and they are the same ones endured by men—dislocated knees, torn tendons, weekly bruises the color of asphalt, black eyes and twisted ankles. "This is not," says Sand, "a game for pussies."

Just ask third-year head coach Brian Allinger, who got into the game because his wife was a player. She is now on the nine-month injured reserved list, pregnant with their second child.

"These women want to scratch their competitive itch," Allinger explains. "Many have competed in athletics in high school and college, and they have this passion for competition that can only be expressed in their sports." And, for many, their choice is football.

Football is also America's favorite sport. This year's Super Bowl drew record audiences, and in football-crazy Oregon—where the freeway closes down as fans drive to Eugene for the annual Civil