

Ex-cheerleader tackles flag football

By Annemarie Schulte
Associate News Editor

I can't believe I'm actually going through with this. I've signed my release form, I've bought a pair of cleats, I've gotten out of class early...even though I'm prepared, I'm scared out of my mind.

Besides P.E. in grade school, I've never played a sport in my 19 years of existence. Throughout high school, I had P.E. waived because I participated in at least two seasons of cheerleading a year Varsity Football and boys' basketball cheerleading. I thanked God every day for not subjecting me to P.E. and keeping my self-esteem intact.

I am the girl who hits herself in the face when trying to dribble a basketball or spike a volleyball and the girl who can watch an entire football game and not have any idea about what is going on in front of her. Nor am I meant to play sports; I'm uncoordinated and clumsy and I trip over my own feet.

The only experience I have ever had on a basketball court or football field has been cheering the players on, not playing in the game. That is my place, my home, on the sidelines. So why am I here standing on a field, trying to get myself to believe that I can play a sport? No idea. But it's exhilarating.

It's my first flag football game and I have NO idea what I'm doing. Someone once told me to do at least one thing a day that scares me though, and that keeps running through my head. It moves my legs and makes me walk out onto the field.

The game starts before I am aware of it and I'm mostly standing around for fear of getting in the way of people who actually know where they're going. It's pouring down rain and I'm already soaked. I keep my head up though, determined to prove myself as a girl, even more so as a cheerleader.

I don't really know what's going on. Actually, I really have no idea what's going on. I keep hearing terms thrown around like "shotgun," "blitz," and "go short!" These boys might as well be speaking Latin to me. In fact, I may have a better chance of understanding that.

Numerous times I catch myself



All photos by Brian Steele Clackamas

Four teams of Clackamas students took to the field in an epic flag football tournament on Friday, Oct. 23. The event was organized by the Associated Student Government as part of the intramural sports.

standing with the wrong team and running after the wrong team. I'm sure I look laughable, to tell the truth. At least there are two other girls on the other team and so I don't feel so out of place with the 15 or so other guys sprinting around me.

While I'm daydreaming, I realize I'm on the wrong side of the field. Had I realized this by myself I wouldn't have been so embarrassed, but it's when one of team mates says, "Annemarie, over here," and draws everyone's attention to me that I blush.

During the first game I am called

"the girl," e.g. "someone cover the girl, get the girl." My team wins and so we go on to another game. By this time I've realized that every time a ball comes even near me I run, scream and/or duck. It's embarrassing and I seriously don't know why I do it.

It's then that it hits me that it's my survival instinct. For every sport I cheered for, if a ball was coming near you, you ran the other way. Run now, ask questions later. There was so many times I got hit by an out of bounds ball during a game that I know to just get out of the way. So that's what I do.

It's the second game, and I am the only girl on the entire field. Now I feel out of place. I thought there were supposed to be two girls per team? It makes me feel pretty self-conscious. This team has dubbed me "Shorty" (although at 5'6" I hardly consider myself short for a girl, but I realize I'm nicknamed as so because I am the shortest player out here) and they constantly forget to block me. I get a pass thrown to me because no one is ever guarding me, but it's too high. If only I could have jumped a little higher, I could have had my one moment of sports glory.

My hair that was beautifully straightened this morning is now dripping wet and tangled. My socks are muddy, and my hands are freezing. Still I'm not going to sit out; I don't want my team to think I'm just a wimp. But my hair is my obsession and it's kind of hard to get over the state of it right now, so I just throw it in a pony tail and try to forget about how long it's going to take for me to comb it out later.

By this time the grass has been torn up by all the cleats (which thankfully I am wearing or else I'm sure I'd be on my butt every other minute) and rain so it's basically pure mud and even with cleats it's hard to get enough grip to run fast.

I've assisted in making a few tackles and gotten close to getting a few all by myself. I'm running around and actually kind of getting the gist of what's going on. I'm no longer just stumbling around a muddy football field with a bunch of boys.

We win our second game and go on to our third. I'm pretty surprised we've managed to stay undefeated with me on the team; I thought I was a jinx to sports. But I'm not messing up too bad and we've won all our games so I can safely assume by this time that my team doesn't hate me and most likely will allow me to continue to play with them next week.

We win our third and last game (still no sign of any other girls on the last two teams we've played) and

I'm so tired from running. A few times I believe I saw a flash before my eyes when I was rounded by six or seven guys coming over me, running around or jumping too high for me to see of the way.

I've managed to stay on the field though, and I haven't even once. I've stayed pretty dry (not dry) save for my socks and hands. Honestly, I can't really say it's over. I can't believe I

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Above: Garrett Schnell punts the ball to the opposing team as Annemarie Schulte hustles down field to tackle the kick returner.

without 1) embarrassing the team 2) falling and 3) being too big, borrowed-from-a-boy basketball shorts. Many a time I was dangerously low while I was on the field for my life.

I feel good though, I did something completely out of my comfort zone, far from anything I would do. I'm actually looking forward to next Friday, and I've already promised myself to practice practicing and catching the ball as "memorizing and learning what 'shotgun' means."

Hey, maybe this is what I've meant to do my whole life: cheerleading. OK maybe not exactly where I belong, I'm one hell of a time playing this game.