

# Women Thriving in Traditionally All-Male American Football

Tala Hadavi | June 07, 2011

American Football has supplanted baseball in recent years as America's favorite sport. But though men and women both enjoy it, it has traditionally been played almost entirely by men. The past few years, however, have seen the debut of a number of women's leagues - playing by the same rules and with the same level of contact as the men's sport.

When you think about American football, you envision it being played by heavily-padded big men making violent contact with each other. But Tarsha Fain, team captain of the Baltimore Nighthawks says, think again.

"I feel women can do anything a man can do," said Fain. "The same way they get out there and hit, we get out there and hit too."

Fain and team owner Tanya Bryan were part of the first ever women's World Championship tournament played last year. The U.S. team, with Fain playing and Bryan serving as team manager, won the gold medal.

"To be the first, the first time it was done, and be a part of it, no one else can ever say that," said Bryan. "So it's just a wonderful feeling and I'm so proud of that."

And the sport is growing. Perhaps a dozen women's professional leagues have been formed in the U.S. in recent years, though many of those have either merged or gone out of business.

Ghoncheh Mossanen is an offensive specialist. For Mossanen, who has played football for 28 years, the sport is her therapy. It is what she looks forward to the most.

"I feel the transformation when I go from putting on my gear and stepping on this football field. It's a huge mental transformation," Mossanen explained.

Mossanen moved to the U.S. from Iran as a child and still remembers the first time she ever played football in a neighborhood pickup game.

"I remember getting the phone call from my cousin saying 'come on out, we need one more person to play.' I didn't know what it was. I had never played the game and I remember going out there and just fell in love with it," she recalled.

Most of the other players on the team have also played since they were kids, often either informally or in non-contact leagues. But for team owner Tanya Bryan, football was a completely new experience.

"It's funny; I didn't even realize the sport existed for women," Bryan said. "And I got a phone call from a friend of mine and she said there was an opportunity to own a team in Baltimore. And I thought it sounded really exciting and I said yes, and four years later here I am."

When Bryan bought the team she did not expect to make money right away - though after four years, she is now breaking even. But she thought it was more important to give young women in the area the opportunity to play the sport.

"Most of the time as women growing up we're told not to be aggressive, not to be assertive," Bryan noted. "It's nice to have an outlet where you can come somewhere and let all of that out. You can be loud, you can hit somebody. You can just let it all go. It's really healthy and the team camaraderie is fantastic."

The teamwork is evident throughout their recent game against the Firebirds. After a slow first half, the Nighthawks scored and hung on for an 8-0 win, qualifying them for the playoffs.

"It's elation! I mean the team deserves it. We've been playing hard. It's amazing. Now it's our chance to make the championship," said Mossanen.



The Baltimore Nighthawks line up against the Philadelphia Firebirds