

A league of her own

June 12, 2003

A league of her own

Former Terrapin softball player doubles as PG county cop, women's football star

*By Ryan Young
Senior staff writer*

Almost.

In high school, it was volleyball, basketball and softball. With the Terrapins, just softball. But sports were her life. Her father, Paul, said that by the age of 10, she was playing baseball with the boys.

But now she had the job she had always wanted - being a police officer in Prince George's County. That's what she studied for. That's all she ever wanted to be.

It wasn't enough, though. The urge was still there - the competitive urge that drove her and friend Monica Livingston to join a flag football league, and then to check out a game in the D.C. Divas' inaugural season in the National Women's Football Association.

They hadn't signed up to play because they, like many others, had doubts about the competitiveness of the league. It only took one game to change their minds.

"We were like, 'I don't know if the league's going to last. Is it really going to be that competitive?'" Livingston said. "So, we sat around the first season. We went to one game, and we were hooked. We were like, 'Oh my god, we just made the biggest mistake of our life not trying out for this team.'"

That was two years ago. Last year, they were in. And this year, Hamlin took over the starting quarterback job.

"I couldn't stay away any longer, and now it's my life," Hamlin said.

The lights of RFK Stadium shone brightly last Saturday - a dreary, rainy evening - as fans arrived for the football game. Some wear the home team's colors, burgundy and gold.

But it's not as it may seem.

The game is not in RFK. It's across the street at Eastern Senior High School. The field is not well maintained. The grass is overgrown, the ground muddy. The team is the D.C. Divas. The crowd no larger than 175 people, and they sit on aluminum bleachers, not in seats.

The challenge is earning respect for the league and for women's football in general. Progress is coming though.

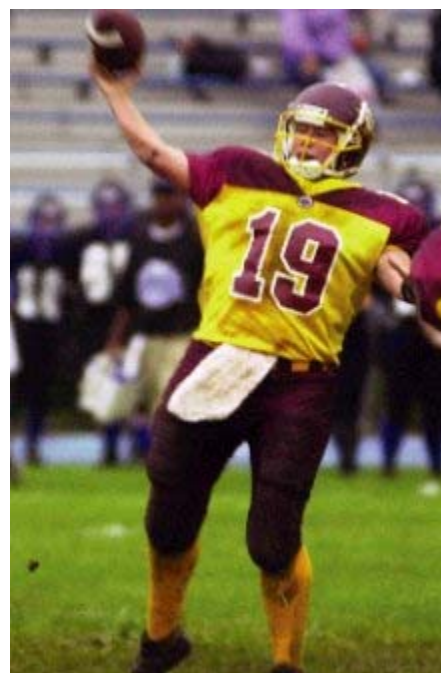
"It was tough at first, no doubt about it," Hamlin said. "Between this year and last year, there's a world of difference."

It's all about dispelling the misconceptions surrounding the league.

"A lot of people think we're just there to say we're there and to say we're pros," Hamlin said. "They think we just throw these pads on and do whatever, but all you have to do is see it and then you'll understand."



Allyson Hamlin, sitting, is the starting quarterback of the D.C. Divas of the National Women's Football Association, a women's tackle football league. PHOTOS BY ADAM NEWMAN--THE DIAMONDBACK



Hamlin's team is 7-0 and headed to the playoffs.



That's all it took for Ezra Cooper, the Divas' head coach. A former high school football coach, Cooper agreed to help the Divas run tryouts for their inaugural season. That's all he thought he had signed up for.



Hamlin scrambles Saturday vs. the Columbus Flames.

"I had no intentions of coaching," Cooper said. "But I came out and saw the quality of the athletes and how much they really had a desire, and I was really hooked."

Three years later, he's still there.

"To most skeptics, I just tell them 'Give 'em a game. If you really like football, come out and watch it and you'll be hooked like I am,'" Cooper said.

The game is slower. The hits aren't as hard. It's just a different game, and that's how they are trying to sell it. The players don't get paid. That's not what it's about.

"We're not out here to compete with the guys," Hamlin said. "We just want a chance to play against each other and show that we can play football. We may not hit as hard and we may not run as fast, but we can do everything else."

The Divas won the game Saturday, downing Columbus, 8-7. Hamlin accounted for the points - a five yard touchdown pass, a wobbling floater over the outstretched hands of the defense. The team is 7-0 and headed to the playoffs.

That's still a couple weeks away though. For the immediate future, Hamlin is headed back to work. She had to miss her police shift to be at the game. She said she's in a fortunate situation because her supervisors understand when she needs to be on the field, not in the field.

Her father understands too. Paul Hamlin said he was skeptical at first, but then he saw a game. And that's all it took.

"They're for real," he said.

His daughter just has to keep convincing people. One game at a time.

"D.C. wants a winner and that's what we're giving them," she said. "From there, hopefully it catches on."