

# Girl power on the gridiron

**Wade Young**

Montgomery Messenger

Don't let her looks or her gender fool you. Dressed in football pads with a fierce determination, Anastasia "Ana" Stasney is out to win on the gridiron.

According to veteran coaches, Stasney is the first female to play football for Tri-City United School and the previous Montgomery-Lonsdale School District.

Ana's introduction to football started when her brothers Tadd, 23, and Jayden, 20 played the sport. Even then, she thought it was rather boring - until she started to play it.

The speed, athletics and agility piqued her interest when she was in sixth grade at TCU Montgomery. During recess, she started playing two-hand touch football with her friends, all of whom are boys. As the year progressed, she started catching on to the game and began to like it.

"Before, I knew nothing about football, but over the school year, I got really good at it," she explained. "It seemed fun. I had all this height built into me and I could run."

Ana, the daughter of Dean and Cathy Stasney, was introduced to tackle football at varsity coach Ken Helland's annual Football Camp held in July.

When she heard her daughter want to play tackle football, Cathy was worried.

"Me, being a mom, I was concerned for her sake emotionally and physically," she said. "I said there's going to be boys who aren't going to give a rip if you're a girl, and they're going to tackle ... and tackle hard."

On the first day, Ana said her presence seemed to bother some players, but her friends rallied around her.

"When I first walked on to the field, I could hear people murmuring and looking at me and stuff, and my friends met me under a tree where they had their stuff. They welcomed me," she said, adding that there was one boy who asked why she was in football.

The fearless seventh grader told her soon-to-be teammate, "Because I can be!"

A friend backed her up, saying, "Yeah! Because she can be!"

Ana said tackle football is more physical than the two-hand touch football she had played on the playground but she didn't mind.

"Tackling someone is fun," she said. "I kind of like rough-housing."

Her coach, John Goebel, said Ana is doing great.

"She is always watching and learning. Though she may not talk a lot, it shows during practice that she has been paying attention," he said.

The season just started and the team played their first game in Waseca last Thursday. She played cornerback who covers receivers, to defend against pass offenses and make tackles. Her coach wants to make use of her height and speed.

"She is fast and tall, and at that position you need to be able to think on the go. I think she would handle that just fine after some practices," Goebel stated.

Ana doesn't consider herself a sports enthusiast. She hadn't really watched football before because she never understood the game.

That's about to change. "Now, I'm probably going to watch it more because I know what's going on," she stated.

Goebel is happy to have her on the team.

"Congrats to her and this team. I think she is breaking new ground that girls don't have to be cheerleaders and volleyball players during the fall," he said. "If she wants to play football, I'm going to treat her as I would any of the other players on the team. I don't think she would want the extra attention just because she is a girl, but if I see that she is struggling with something, for sure, I will help her out just like I would with anyone else."

Eighth grader Brandt



Wade Young Photo

Ana Stasney, a seventh grader playing football for Tri-City United Middle School, is pictured after her first game against Waseca last Thursday.

Lemieux practices with Ana's grade. He's been in football for four years. Even in younger grades during recess, he had never played the sport with a girl. When he saw her walk on the field for practice, he didn't mind.

Now that they have practiced for a couple of weeks, he thinks she has some football skills.

"I think she's good," he stated.

Outside of her new career

in football, Ana's determination and athleticism have made her excel in another sport - the martial art of Taekwondo. She has practiced and studied it for three years, earning nine belts so far. She recently earned the high red belt, which is two belts below a black belt.

To help her get ready for the football season, Ana ran and exercised more.

While Cathy was worried about her daughter's gridiron

season, Dean wasn't.

"He said she'll be fine," Cathy stated with a laugh.

And, so it seems. One night a while ago when the

family was watching football, they witnessed a huge pile of tackled players, one on top of the other. Cathy quickly declared, "Ana, that

might be you at the bottom!"

But, Ana responded with a smile, "I was already at the bottom of the pile. It was kind of fun."

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