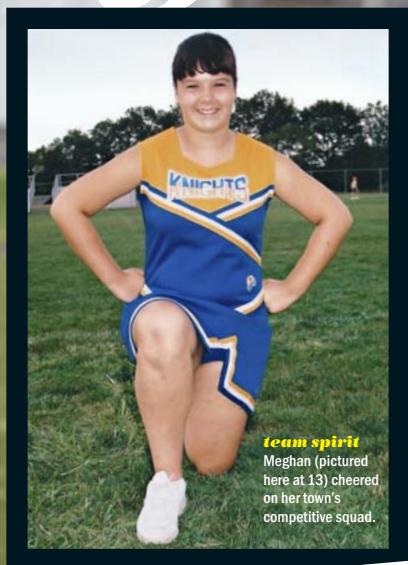


# Life



**team spirit**  
Meghan (pictured here at 13) cheered on her town's competitive squad.



**“i went from cheerleader to football player!”**

You can do *anything* a guy can do, but football is still a total boys' club. That didn't stop Meghan, 15, who dreamed of making the team!  
as told to ashley mateo

**E**veryone has that stereotypical idea of a cheerleader: cute, peppy, bows in her hair. And that was me, from kindergarten to eighth grade. I loved being on the squad, from the girly parts like curling each other's hair for competitions to trying new stunts at practice. But I also loved watching the football games as we cheered—sometimes I was more focused on the plays than our routines! Every time someone scored, I wished that I was the one in the end zone.

## a long shot

I grew up tossing a football and going to games with my dad. Once while waiting to cheer in my middle school game, my dad and I were watching the high school team play—they were losing—and he said, “I bet you could do better than that.” His words stuck with me, and right before my freshman year, I started to feel bored with cheerleading—and more excited about football. I thought, Maybe I *should* be on the field.

I decided to go to a preseason meeting to see about joining the team, even though they'd never had a girl on the roster before. When I walked into the school gym, packed with guys and parents waiting for info, everyone turned and stared, like, What is *she* doing here? I saw guys I had cheered for—guys I considered friends—and I wondered what they thought about me *playing* alongside them. My school is small, so there aren't tryouts—you just sign up for the team. But I still had to officially sign up in front of the whole crowd, with all eyes on me. I could feel the tension in the room, and as I walked up to hand in my forms, I almost felt like I was doing something *wrong*. I worried, Are the coaches going to laugh at me? Will they tell me I can't play? Instead, they looked at me like I was pulling a joke

on them, but they finally took my papers and told me to show up for training camp the week before school. I was officially a football player!

## tumbles to tackles

Making the team might have been easy, but *earning* my spot among the guys was harder. I changed alone in the girls' locker room, and I wasn't allowed in with the guys until everyone was dressed. The first time I walked into *their* space, most of the guys fell totally silent, and a few even huddled up laughing at me. They never said anything mean to my face, but that almost made it worse—the guys were often loud and goofy, teasing each other. But the fact that they talked about me in whispers made me feel like they were talking trash. I knew I was where I wanted to be, but I also felt like an outsider.

“Everyone stared, like, What is *she* doing here?”

I missed my cheer squad and thought maybe I had made a mistake—the high school cheerleaders even told me girls shouldn't be allowed to play, which hurt. But I knew I belonged on the field. And my friends had my back—they thought I was a bad-ass!



**one of the guys** Meghan's ponytail is the only hint to opponents that they're up against a tough chick!

So instead of dwelling on the fact that I felt left out, I gave myself pep talks and decided I just had to prove my value to the team. Every practice, I gave it my all, running plays, jumping hurdles, and pushing sandbags until my body hurt. After a month, the guys became more welcoming—cheering me on at games and practice, and including me in conversations off the field. One even told me, “You've got guts to be here!”

I felt tougher when my coach made me a defensive tackle. That position is no joke; my whole role is to take people down! I get hit a *lot* and it hurts—once, my shoulder popped out! The first time a player charged at me was scary, but the first time I tackled someone was a rush! I felt empowered that I could hold my own.

## breaking the mold

Last September, I got my big moment: Coach put me in a varsity game . . . and we won! Finally, I felt like I was a *real* part of the team—not because I was accepted by the guys, but because I had helped us to victory.

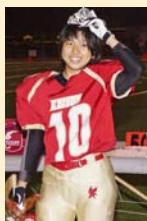
At pep rallies, I get a standing ovation, and I've had girls tell me they want to play football now too! It can be intimidating to be so outnumbered by guys, but as girls, we can't let that stop us from going after our goals! **17**

she's got **GAME!**

Out of the million-plus varsity high school football players across the US, only about 1,600 are female—that's only **less than 1 percent!** Here are three more girls who have stormed the field:



**She's the first female quarterback!**  
Erin DiMeglio, 18, was the first girl in FL to play this key position in a varsity high school football game.



**She's homecoming queen and a receiver!**  
Cynthia Cheng, 17, wore her sash over her jersey during the crowning ceremony at her high school in NJ.



**She fought for her right to play!**  
Ashley Lytle, 17, was denied a spot on her high school team in PA because she was a girl, so she threatened to sue. Now she's on varsity!