

## **FCSSC Makes Sport Accessible for WesternU Women's Football Team**

*One tournament away from a fairy-tale ending.*

The Western University Women's Football team is 18-0. Like many other sports, their season was put on hold in the wake of COVID-19.

The Western women's football program started back in 2012 by a group of residence league sophomores, who noticed ladies were playing 'powder-puff' at other OUA schools – Laurier, Toronto, Mac to name a few. The student coaches recruited girls from the popular residence flag football league on campus to form the squad.

The women's football team trains three times a week and competes in the brutal cold of the Canadian winters from January to March each year. The ladies play against 13 other universities and colleges in a combination of tackle and flag football. Year after year, Western is consistently at the top 3 level!



But, this 2020 undefeated squad didn't have an easy start to the season. The team only had 8 fully functioning flags and 6 balls – for 50 athletes! The same equipment from the program's inauguration eight years ago! The team's president and quarterback, Olivia Ghosh-Swaby, put a call out to the community for help during a radio interview with CBC London last September. The team was looking for new equipment for their players, namely new flags and more junior footballs.

Kyla Woodcock, Founder of the Forest City Sport & Social Club (FCSSC), was listening to the program that morning. "When I heard Olivia on CBC, I was inspired to help. I have very fond memories of playing powder-puff football in university with a great group of girls. I knew that if I responded to Olivia's ask for support from the community that others would get the chance to experience similar camaraderie and the fun of flag football."

Many of the other teams in the powder-puff league are recognized in some way by their universities or colleges – either by the Sports & Rec department or by Student Council as a club. However, Team Purple doesn't receive any financial support from Western University; the program is self-run and self-funded. The Western women's program has a great small group of sponsors, who help to alleviate that financial burden on the players' season fees.



“When Kyla reached out, I was shocked and elated,” says Ghosh-Swaby. “More so, because a female leader who started a London based program that encourages sport for adults and includes co-ed football was interested in helping! Kyla was more than ready to pay for all the new equipment we needed! This contribution allowed us to put the money from our Go Fund Me page toward covering gear and tournaments, which helped reduce team fees significantly and reduced the financial barrier to play!”

And that’s exactly one of FCSSC’s core values – making sport accessible to all in the community. “FCSSC has always tried to make sport accessible to anyone who wants to play.” Woodcock continues, “Contributing to Western University Women's Flag Football was about making the sport accessible to those who really wanted to play. And there were a lot of them! We met over 100 people at the try-outs last September! After meeting Olivia and the team of volunteer coaches, it was very clear that they were determined to make the team successful, not just this year, but for years to come.”

“Seeing FCSSC step up really solidified the importance of community support and that all we need are individuals who are just as passionate about equal opportunity for women to make a difference, says Ghosh-Swaby. “The fact that FCSSC is a local organization shows that home/local is where true support and care for our program exists. FCSSC was invested in seeing our athletes get the opportunity to play!”



“Sport is a very powerful community connector.” Woodcock explains, “For all of it's physical, and psychological benefits, it is worth investing in, as a player, an organizer and as a sponsor. Our community is a better place when we all get out and play together.”

Although the teams are unsure of the final outcome of the season, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Western program has elected to postpone the final tournament to the end of the March or the first weekend of April. If the health authorities deem it is still unsafe to play, there will not be a 2020 champion.

Ghosh-Swaby says the goal is to have women’s football be recognized at a higher level within university varsity sport programs. Despite tackling the red tape one yard at a time, Ghosh Swaby is optimistic for the future of university women’s football.

Maybe one day soon we’ll achieve equality on the gridiron – and witness a true Cinderella story.



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*(Pictures courtesy of Instagram - westernuwomensfb)*