

Flag football frenzy takes hold for females in Massachusetts

Greater Lowell Tech, Collegiate excited about adding girls flag football club teams



Greater Lowell Tech flag football player Alexis Peralta, left, motors past a teammate during a recent practice session.



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Flag football fever is catching on in the Merrimack Valley.

Look no further than at Greater Lowell Tech, where the Gryphons recently hosted a small army of female athletes all vying for a spot on its inaugural team.

“Numbers were incredible for our first go at this,” said Greater Lowell Tech athletic director Mark White. “Over 50 girls came out for tryouts, which we were very excited about.”

“This is the toughest roster spot to get in the history of the school.” said Gryphons coach Randy Briere.

And that's just the start of an ever-expanding operation. After launching a highly successful pilot program last spring, which featured eight schools, a plethora of local athletic directors are now jumping on board, with 18 high school girls flag football club teams set to kick off in 2024.

Last spring the Ayer-Shirley Panthers were part of the inaugural movement, joining the likes of the Chelsea Red Devils, Fitchburg Red Raiders, Leominster Blue Devils, Needham Rockets, Peabody Tanners, St. Mary's Spartans and Woburn Tanners. Backed by the New England Patriots Foundation, the teams competed at the Gillette Stadium Championship Tournament hosted by Kraft Sports.

This year, they've got plenty of company, with Lowell High, Greater Lowell Tech and the Collegiate Charter of Lowell also signing on, riding a growing wave of momentum for year two. Nine other schools – Cambridge, Greater Lawrence, Groton-Dunstable, Pentucket, Salem, South Lancaster, Springfield, Veritas Prep and Winthrop – round out the highly competitive field of 18.

State Rep. Rodney Elliott spearheaded the recent expansion push.

"Commitment to inclusivity and gender equity is embodied in this exciting venture," said Elliott. "The program will empower girls to encompass invaluable life lessons. It is imperative that we provide the same opportunities for these lifelong tools to female athletes as we do for the male population."

And there is no better place to expand that mission than the Mill City.

"Lowell is home to the Merrimack Valley Women's Flag Football League," said Elliott. "I've had many constituents discuss the importance of flag football, recognizing that it is one of the fastest growing sports today."

He hopes the movement will inspire other schools statewide to start programs of their own in the coming years.

"We have 18 teams total as of now," said Jeff Johnson, program coordinator for the Patriots Girls Flag Football Program. "Our hope is to get to 30 this year."

Collegiate Charter signed on after Elliot reached out to the school, putting them in contact with the Kraft Group.

"As a growing athletic program, we're always looking for opportunities for students," said Collegiate Charter athletic director Kyle Pelczar. "We are very excited to be a part of something that we think is very special."

Pelczar surveyed his female student-athletes to gauge their interest and got a strong response. They currently have a dozen girls on their roster for 5-on-5 play.

“All of them bought into the program,” said Pelczar. “I believe that the flag football program is here to stay with schools adding teams each year. There’s even one school who is adding a second team, because they have a lot of girls interested in playing flag football.”

Although Greater Lowell Tech could certainly add a B-squad as early as this year, they’ll play it safe this season, but are already considering their options for 2025.

“For logistical reasons, and this being our first crack at this, we limited ourselves to one team this spring with a final roster of 18 players,” said White. “The hope will be to add a second team next spring if interest continues to be this high in the program.”

“We’re just very excited to launch this new program, and thankful for the opportunity,” White added. “The excitement was obvious in the number of young ladies who came out to try something new, which isn’t always easy for young people to do. My hope is that as this continues to grow the MIAA may consider adding it to the list of sanctioned varsity sports within their organization.”



Greater Lowell Tech quarterback Jaylene Tatro, left, bolts up the field during a recent flag football practice session.



Greater Lowell Tech flag football player Reynajane Javier looks for an opening during a recent practice.



Greater Lowell Tech flag football player Kendra O'Brien, right, darts down the field during a recent practice.