

sound advice

Women learn to talk the talk

By Dana Coffield
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They may not be allowed to play, but women like football.

The National Football League and major sporting goods manufacturers have figured that out, offering all kinds of girly team gear, like the recently released line of Reebok-brand logo wear, proportioned for women and with a little sparkle.

But if you're going to wear a shirt declaring your allegiance to a team, you'd better be prepared to talk sports, says Paula Duffy, who coaches women to be informed fans at incidentalcontact.com.

Duffy, who learned football from her dad (he was a rabid New York sports- team fanatic when she was a girl), says it's never too late to take up the game, even if it takes some work to learn the playbook.

Don't fake it. "We all know where faking gets us on other fields of play. With sports, it's the same thing," Duffy says wryly.

Start with the basics. A good first stop? Ivette Ricco's femmeffan.com. Click on "Talk the talk" and page through Football 101. Duffy also likes Denver Post sports columnist Woody Paige for his ability to distill the important parts of the game without writing in language that can be decoded only by someone with a lifetime of football knowledge. "He has a strong feminine side," Duffy says.

Overwhelmed by the X's and O's? Embrace the human factor instead. Duffy says there's no shame in picking a player and following him -

on and off the field. "There is a blending of sports and entertainment. You see people like (New England Patriots quarterback) Tom Brady in People and US Weekly. You can be a fan of the human element of the games." Duffy says on and off the field. "There is a blending of sports and entertainment. You see people like (New England Patriots quarterback) Tom Brady in People and US Weekly. You can be a fan of the human element of the games." Duffy says espn.com's Page 2 columnist Jemele Hill does a great job explaining the hot pro sports topics of the day, covering everything from the Isiah Thomas scandal to why Barry Bonds belonged at the All-Star game.

Learn some basics. Duffy advises scanning the sports headlines and looking for articles that are less about the "grunt work of X's and O's," and more about the human interest. "You'll find a way to connect."

Ask someone like Woody. Learning the ins and

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outs of football is like "getting on a merry-go-round that's been spinning for 100 years," so you'll have to find someone open to teaching you the nuances, Duffy says. "Fans who have never played the game are more open to including women, and men who have daughters are usually OK with it, too."

Try a sports bar. Once you've versed yourself in the basics, try venturing out to a sports bar. Duffy warns, however, that you should be prepared to witness "men in their natural habitat," eating stuff that's not on their diets and getting a little drunk. She says if you know enough about the game to ask a few questions with confidence, you'll probably find a male buddy at the bar who is willing to help advance your knowledge.

That said, do not break the cardinal rule of fandom by talking while the action is on in the game. If the game is out of reach - i.e. there is no chance of a come-from-behind victory for one of the teams - the rules of conversation change.

Paula Duffy answers all kinds of sports questions at AskPaula, at femmefan.com . and appears on the Sports Journey radio show, 10 a.m.-noon MST Saturdays and Sundays at sportsjourney.com . and espnflorida.com .

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