



The women of the Nevada Storm line up.

FULL CONTACT

The president of the board, Carrie “C-Mack” Mackey, is built like what she is—a linebacker. She was a catcher for the University of Nevada, Reno softball team and has played roller derby, volleyball and basketball. She loves the full contact of football.

“You can get physical in basketball, but nothing like this, you know? Being able to see someone there, and you can just lay them out,” she said. “And what’s nice about this sport is it’s for every body size, for every body shape. You can be tiny. You can be big. We have a position for you in football. It’s not like volleyball—they all want tall, skinny girls.”

She said that common responses about the team include “Is it a lingerie league?” and “Girls shouldn’t be playing a contact sport like that.”

“There’s nothing wrong with it,” she said. “If the boys can do it, why can’t we? We’re playing against other women. We’re not playing against men right now. ... Me, by myself, I’m as strong as a lot of guys, if not stronger. So, I don’t have a problem with it. I know other girls—they’re always up for a challenge.”

Mackey acknowledges that injuries are just part of the sport.

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“I’ve had my fair share,” she said. “I’ve actually had two knee surgeries because of the sport. I’ve torn my ACL [anterior cruciate ligament], dislocated my knee, two meniscus surgeries. ... I got old lady knees. I squeak, I creak, and sometimes I wake up the next day saying, why am I doing this? But it’s worth it. I’ve got a few years left.”

“Player safety is always number one,” according to the Storm’s head coach, Chris Garza. “We try to mitigate everything we can with the workouts that we do. We only use proven methods. We don’t teach anything that’s

kind of crazy or those 1980s tackling drills or anything like that. We try to keep up with the times. Our coaches try to stay up to date with everything we can do to keep things safe.”

He also coaches a local high school boys’ team. “Coaching women is no different than coaching men,” he said. However, he said that he needs less of the drill sergeant approach he sometimes needs for high school boys, but that probably has less to do with gender than it does with age. The Storm players are all over 18.

“Once I got out here, I realized it was a treasure trove of athletes and a great opportunity,” Garza said. “I really hope we get more attention from our city and more help and encouragement from them. I’d like to see this as a bigger organization, with a team of 40 or 50 ladies wanting to play football.”

Ryia Grant is a rookie on the team. She was approached by Storm players because she played on the Reed High School team.

“Playing with girls is completely different than playing with guys,” Grant said. “The camaraderie is completely different. I feel more a part of this team than I ever did on the Reed team. ... The world doesn’t—I don’t want to say that they don’t want to see girls playing football, but they don’t want to see girls in football pads. They want to see girls in a different way. And us saying, ‘Hey, we can get out there and be just as tough as a bunch of boys.’ There is some of that us-against-the-world thing.”

For Grant, the biggest surprise about joining the Nevada Storm was the team’s dedication.

“I didn’t anticipate how intense it would be,” she said. “Actually getting on the field and being with the girls and the coaches—they’re very serious about it. That was a good surprise—a very good surprise.” □

The Nevada Storm opens its season in Bishop, California, taking on Eastern Sierra Mustangs on April 6. Their first home game is against the Utah Blitz on April 20 at Damonte Ranch High School. Kickoff is at 4 p.m.

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