

Virginia woman makes college football history by stepping onto the field

By The Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.05.23

Word Count **576**

Level **680L**



Haley Van Voorhis (number 10) made college football history when she joined the Shenandoah University team on the field during a recent game. "I want to show other people this is what women can do, to show what I can do. It's a big moment," she said. Photo: Keric Jackson/Shenandoah University Communications Photo: Keric Jackson/Shenandoah University Communications

Virginia university student Haley Van Voorhis made college football history. Less than a minute was left in the first quarter of the game. Her school, Shenandoah University, was already leading by 26 points.

The team coach sent the 5-foot-6, 145-pound third-year student into the game. She became one of the first women to play in an NCAA football game.

"It's an amazing thing," Van Voorhis said after the game. "I want to show other people this is what women can do, to show what I can do. It's a big moment. I made the impossible possible, and I'm excited about that."

Success In A Storm

Van Voorhis waited for more than two years for the chance to play. When it came, she didn't disappoint. It was her role to rush the quarterback. She got through and managed to hit the Juniata College quarterback an instant after he had released the ball.

An ESPN camera crew was also there in case Van Voorhis played. With her help, Shenandoah beat Juniata by a score of 48-7. The weather was very wet and windy, thanks to Tropical Storm Ophelia.

Tracy Fitzsimmons is the president of Shenandoah. She was clearly thrilled to see Van Voorhis play.

She is the school's first female president since it was founded in 1875. "I am so happy for Haley because she's earned this," said Fitzsimmons.

Football Firsts

Van Voorhis has been playing against boys since she joined a flag football team in fifth grade. She was the only girl on that team. She continued playing the game she has loved from the very beginning.

Van Voorhis also was the first girl to play football at her high school. She was named team captain her senior year.

Her high school coach, Edward Homer, once said, "She's not afraid of anything."

Hard Work Pays Off

Several Division III schools wanted her. When Shenandoah offered her a spot on the team, Van Voorhis took it. Over her first two years, she practiced daily and played in games with the junior team. Over the summer she played with the D.C. Divas in a women's pro league.

Her head coach at Shenandoah is Scott Yoder. He said he did not hesitate to send Van Voorhis into the game.

"Haley's been a great teammate," Yoder said. "She's quiet and goes about her business. The guys respect her because she shows up and does the work on the field and in the weight room."

Yoder said that Van Voorhis has a chance to see more playing time in the future. "Her role will grow, definitely."

"Don't Be Scared"

Van Voorhis only got into the Saturday game for one play. But that was exciting enough for her parents, who were at the game.

"We're just so happy for her," said her father, Chandler Van Voorhis. "We know how much she's put into it and how much it means to her."

The coaches had told her to be ready to play, but "she was born ready," he said.



Image 1. Since joining her college football team, Haley Van Voorhis says she has put in much work and effort to become a better player. Photo: Keric Jackson/Shenandoah University Communications

Haley Van Voorhis has a message to other young women who want to play football.

"I would just say, don't listen to people who say don't do it," she said. "Don't be scared. Just go at it with everything you can."