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## Bowie QB survives in no-man's land

By **WARD LUCAS** For the Blade-News

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After a week engrossed in watching game films and studying offensive football plays, player No. 19 eagerly awaits game day.

The game day ritual is quite an intense process. No. 19 has a reputation of being moody and admittedly somewhat "ADD-ish." True friends know not to call, as this quarterback is anxious and focused solely on game day preparations, which include packing a huge bag with football pads, mouthpiece and cleats and all the other necessary items that were washed the night before.

Before heading to the football field, No. 19 dons the same white spandex shorts worn over 12 years ago in high school, Nike flip-flops and a gray shirt silk-screened with the words "Protect this House." A lamented armband with the day's game plays is placed on the right arm. Before departing for the field, the ensemble is topped off with a white baseball cap that is also worn on the sidelines like the great NFL quarterbacks. Without a doubt Brett Farve serves as an inspiration for this quarterback.

On the field by 4 p.m., No. 19 stands in line with teammates waiting to be taped. While both ankles are being tended to, more time is spent studying plays. Prior to kickoff, No. 19 consumes plenty of water to avoid dehydration, meets for final game plans and holds a quarterback's conference. The final uniform touches, pads, socks, shoulder pads, pants and helmet, are put on to signal it's time to do battle.

Allyson "Smooth" Hamlin, No. 19, is more than ready to play some football under the bright lights of Prince George's County Sports & Learning Center football field in Landover. Her team, the D.C. Divas, Washington's only all-female full-contact football team, is also ready to play under the guidance of Hamlin. Hamlin, a former Bowie resident, University of Maryland graduate and current Prince George's County detective, is truly in her element when she is on the gridiron.

But football wasn't always in the cards for Hamlin. She grew up playing baseball, volleyball, basketball and softball, sometimes on boys teams at the club or AAU levels because there were no equivalent teams for girls. She continued her athletic career at College Park, but needed to fill a void once she graduated.

Looking to continue in athletics, Hamlin played on a travel softball team before trying her hand at flag football. She recalls being introduced to the Divas, but thought the concept of a full-contact women's football team would never last. Boy was she wrong and she admits to regretting the decision not to try out initially.

The following year she did try out and nearly six years later she hasn't looked back.

"It's the greatest sport that I ever played. It's so addictive ... the ultimate sport. Every single person has to do their job to make it work," Hamlin professes passionately.

The team consists of volunteers. There are 60 players on the team's roster, but only 45 dress for game day, according to league rules. The remaining 15 players only practice, but appear to be equally committed to the effort. Hamlin says the players are like family and are very close.

The Divas' season starts roughly in April and ends in July with postseason play with practice held twice a week at Sasscer Field in Upper Marlboro. Hamlin complains that the team does not have enough practice, but that couldn't keep the team from earning the title of National Women's Football Association champions for 2006.

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Football is traditionally considered a man's sport and many believe it should stay that way.

"Yeah, people think big brutes running around ... manly scary women," says Hamlin. To those she responds, "We are not trying to be like men. We are women who just want to play each other. We may not be as fast. We may not be as hard hitting ... you can be feminine and strong, too." She respects their opinions, but challenges all the naysayers to come out to a game to witness firsthand what the Divas have to offer.

Despite the opposition from traditionalists, the Divas have a strong following. On any given Saturday, a crowd of 1,500 to 2,500 fans is present at a home game in Landover. Just a few minutes into the game you can see the level of commitment from the players and easily forget that these are women playing football.

Hamlin contradicts the stereotype of a female football player. She keeps her hair cropped in a short pixie style, her toes were well-manicured and she wore two sets of earrings in her ears. In true diva style, she was concerned about how she looked in the event photos following practice.

The Divas has a strong following, too. The team has its own band, The Washington Showstoppers, and a Gold Club that consists of mothers and other family members that ensure game day operations. There are even Divas in Training, or DITs, who are young ladies that serve as cheerleaders and water girls providing "high quality H2O" (a la Adam Sandler in "The Waterboy") to the players with hopes of one day donning the burgundy and gold Divas jersey.

One such young lady is Afriye Quashie. Her mother Nicole is a rookie wide receiver on the practice squad. Afriye, an aspiring medical journalist, hopes to follow in her mom's footsteps and become a Diva.

There is another side to Hamlin. She's a member of the Prince George's County Police force and has been for nearly eight years.

"Being a police officer you get X-ray vision," said Hamlin. That X-ray vision has come in handy even at practice. General manager Rich Daniel recalls a practice where a drunk driver hit a motorcycle and fled the scene. The vehicle later returned and was identified by a witness. Hamlin, in her practice uniform, jumped into

"Being a police officer you get X-ray vision," said Hamlin. That X-ray vision has come in handy even at practice. General manager Rich Daniel recalls a practice where a drunk driver hit a motorcycle and fled the scene. The vehicle later returned and was identified by a witness. Hamlin, in her practice uniform, jumped into

her cruiser and chased the suspect for 10 minutes. She boxed the car in, retrieved her weapon from her trunk and arrested the suspect. Hamlin then returned to practice as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place.

Hamlin spent three-and-a-half years on patrol and then on special assignment for about 18 months in high violent crime areas and in more recent years as a detective. She admits that she doesn't miss the patrol uniform much. Being a detective gives her the opportunity to jazz up a bit. She happily spends more time on personal grooming as a detective than when she worked on patrol.

As a patrolman, Hamlin was hesitant to do so much primping and was more determined to be perceived well and taken serious by her fellow officers and the community, criminals included. Makeup and jewelry were not an option. As a detective and now more established on the force she can provide a coordinated well-groomed presentation in pantsuits of her choosing.

If money was not a factor and she had to choose between the Divas and PGPD, the Divas would win hands down.

"If I could do this (football) for a living, it would be a dream come true," said Hamlin, but she admits she loves being in law enforcement as well. She attributes her ability to balance both work and football to a team of very supportive supervisors and co-workers. Hamlin acknowledges that her job comes first, but admits it's hard and tiring doing both, but remembers on game day why she is on the field. Both provide relief for the other and Hamlin says she wouldn't have it any other way.

She likens football to law enforcement. "(You) can't ever show your fear ... that's half the battle." She gets a rush from outsmarting someone, putting a case together that will do justice for a victim. What destroys that rush is putting someone away for a crime and seeing him or her back on the street, sooner than later.

Hamlin credits her family with being her chief supporters in both her endeavors. Her father, Paul Hamlin, recently purchased the team in an effort to ensure the continuation of the franchise, but there is no nepotism here. Ally, as her father affectionately calls

her, loves and is passionate about team sports.

"Football is the ultimate sport for her personality ..." said Paul Hamlin. "It falls into her physical ability. She has a real grasp of strategy."

Fortunately, Hamlin had already established herself as quarterback and as one of the team captains before her father came along. However, she does have aspirations to be involved with the Divas in a coaching or sports administration capacity once her football career ends.

Until then, Hamlin will suit up for both the D.C. Divas and the PGPD. She and the undefeated Divas are looking forward to their upcoming playoff berth in Atlanta. The team, members of the Independent Women's Football League, is looking forward to the opportunity to covet the title of champions once again.

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