UC SANTA BARBARA

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Play Like a Girl!

By day, they're hard-working UC Santa Barbara staffers, helping students navigate the sometimes confusing world of academia, connecting people and networking, or turning research into new companies. But come quitting time they trade it all for a flag and a football and charge relentlessly toward the end zone.

And they do it all in the name of Alzheimer's research.

These fierce femmes of flag football are Sarah Hilliard, entrepreneurship associate for the Technology Management Program; Samantha Bearman, a mental health peer program coordinator for Counseling & Psychological Services; Ashley Antoon, a recruitment manager for the College of Engineering's Corporate Affiliates Program; and Maddie Foster, a career counselor at the campus's Career Services office. And they are all competitors in this year's RivALZ Blondes vs. Brunettes flag football fundraiser, hosted by the Alzheimer's Association.

"I love how we as women get this opportunity to showcase our athleticism and our strength," said Bearman, who is participating in the fundraiser for the second time. She and Antoon are on the Brunette team while Foster and Hilliard play for the Blondes (they don't actually discriminate by hair color). The women join roughly 60 other players for a game that will take place Saturday, July 21, at Bishop Diego High School.

Much like the old-school comic book superheroes, they're almost unrecognizable in their day jobs as women who would snap the ball, unleash a spiral mid-play or rush

the opposing team’s quarterback.

All the faux aggression is, of course, in good fun. When they’re not training, practicing plays or preparing to scrimmage in the runup to the game, they’re all on the same team, raising funds for research and awareness of Alzheimer’s disease. “A lot of us are playing for people who have lost their battle to Alzheimer’s,” said Bearman, whose grandparents have struggled with the disease.

With the game about a few days away, practices are intensifying and things are getting real. “There’s definitely an element of real football; they run us through legit football drills,” Hilliard said. Open to players of all skill levels, the program takes its players through the basics, from the names of the positions, to the plays, to the rules of the game — although come game day, the women will tell you, the will to win can get intense. “This is my fourth year, and I know they say it’s flag and I understand that we wear flags, but every time I’ve ever caught the ball I end up on the ground because someone tackles me,” Antoon said. “So, it’s all in good fun, but we definitely are more aggressive than flag.”

Not even the prospect of the occasional bump or bruise is enough to dim the players’ excitement. As they support a good cause, they also gain a lot on both a professional and personal level. “Another great thing about this is the opportunity to work in a team in a different environment,” said Foster. “This has diversified my teamwork skills."

Added Hilliard, “I just really wanted to do something to give back to the community. Having a career at UCSB and knowing this is my community, now I‘m trying to find ways to cement myself in my community and this is another big part of doing that."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.