

FAIR PLAY

Sam Rapoport works to make the National Football League more equitable and inclusive.

It has been Sam Rapoport’s mission to connect women and girls to football. Rapoport is the senior director of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the National Football League (NFL). Her dedication has helped her clear her own path through a male-dominated sport. That has led to great things—not just for herself, but for others, too.

GOAL-ORIENTED

Rapoport grew up playing flag and touch football. In the early 2000s, she was a quarterback for two Canadian women’s teams.

While in college, Rapoport applied for an NFL internship. She was rejected. She tried again. This time, along with her résumé, she sent a football and a note asking, “What other quarterback could accurately deliver a ball 386 miles?” That was the distance from her school to the NFL’s office. She got the job. Six years later, in 2009, she won the NFL Commissioner’s Award for Innovation.

But Rapoport wanted to do something for women. In 2010, she left the NFL and created a program called Women’s World Football Games. The event brought together women from 21 countries to play football for a week. “The result is that now we are connected and working together to grow the sport,” she says.

But Rapoport also recognized a problem: Women were more than capable of coaching football, but they were not considered for

coaching positions at the collegiate or professional levels of the sport.

In 2016, Rapoport rejoined the NFL and helped create the NFL Women’s Forum. It’s designed to put women into the running for coaching, scouting, and operations jobs. “This past summer,” she says, “we had more women coaching than in any male professional sport in the world—15, total.”

GAME ON!

Now that women are more visible in football, Rapoport says that girls—and anyone else who feels under-represented in male-dominated sports—can draw inspiration and

confidence from that success.

She has some advice for young people wondering where to start: “Get as much experience as you can while in high school. Volunteer to be an assistant coach or an equipment manager. Play tackle or flag football. Study the game. Do things that demonstrate your love for the game, because that will differentiate you from other people.”

—By Rachel MacPherson

Power Word

operations adjective: having to do with making sure an organization runs smoothly



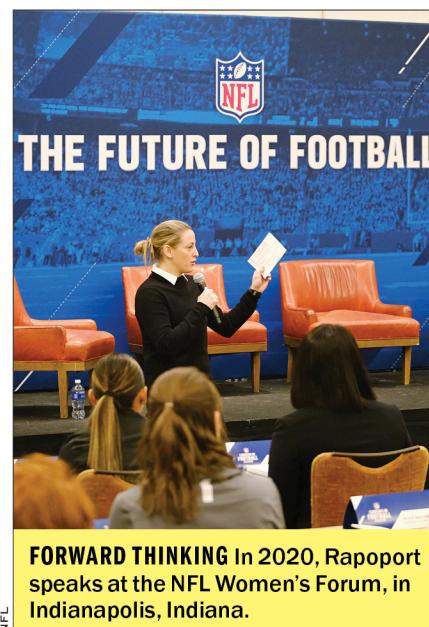
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CAREER-FOCUSED Sam Rapoport, seen here at NFL headquarters, in New York City, is the league’s senior director of diversity, equity, and inclusion.



FORWARD THINKING In 2020, Rapoport speaks at the NFL Women’s Forum, in Indianapolis, Indiana.



PLAY TO WIN Rapoport (back row, in a black sweatshirt) appears at the Women’s World Football Games in Tampa, Florida, in 2014.