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## **Bonita Unified Female Athletes Ready to Dominate in Inaugural Flag Football Season**

**SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE** – It appeared to be a typical summer football practice at Bonita and San Dimas high schools, with new and returning players performing running and passing drills, conferring with their coaches, and looking to find team spirit and chemistry as the teams prepare for the 2024-25 football seasons.

This year, however, it is not just the boys suiting up in football jerseys, looking to make memories. Female athletes now have the thrill of making a touchdown run or maintaining a goal line stand, following the official CIF Southern Section debut of girls flag football in August after a year as a pilot program. Both Bonita and San Dimas are fielding teams and ready to battle for a CIF championship.

“Flag football is important for the San Dimas High sports program because it is a fast-growing sport which will lead to something bigger,” San Dimas flag football coach Tiki Jaime said. “All of the girls on the team are super excited to play. They ask a lot of questions. Every day they come to practice with a smile on their face and ready for business.”

The San Dimas squad recently named four players as co-captains, recognizing and rewarding the leadership skills and tenacity they are seeing every day in practice. One of the Saint co-captains, senior Ashley “Ash” Sandmark, is thrilled to see flag football come to the school and is determined to see her teammates push themselves into becoming a winning unit.

“I am so excited to be a part of San Dimas High’s first flag football team,” Sandmark said. “It’s amazing to see how fast it’s clicking with the players, and how everyone is coming together. From the beginning I’ve seen myself as a motivator, leading the team in stretching and running. My goal is for the team to go all the way and win CIF.”

One opposing player who may stand in the way of that goal is Sandmark’s sister, Bonita High senior Breanna Sandmark, who is looking to make her own mark on the Bearcats’ first flag football team. The friendly rivalry the Sandmark sisters are creating is just one of the many ways family ties are defining the District’s inaugural flag football season.

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“I got inspired to try out for the team because I really enjoyed the spirit of our Powderpuff games,” Breanna said. “It’s exciting to be on the first team, and it will be interesting when Ash and I meet on the field. I’ve never been able to compete against her because we’ve always been on the same team. But my goal is the same – I want to represent our school and hopefully go all the way.”

Among the differences between flag football and full-contact football is that the girls’ teams will start just seven players on the field and – most importantly – blocking, screening and other forms of physical contact are not allowed.

“It’s a new sport and many of our players are unfamiliar with it,” Bonita High flag football coach Mike Mann said. “An understanding of formations, concepts, and technique will all develop over time, but our girls are smart and athletic and have already shown a ton of growth in a short amount of time.”

Both Bonita and San Dimas have 26 to 30 players on their teams. Like the boys’ squads, the two teams will compete in opposing leagues, with Bonita in the Palomares League and San Dimas in the Hacienda League. Both teams will play 13 to 15 games; Bonita opened their season with a 47-0 victory against Don Lugo High School on Aug. 20, and San Dimas defeated West Covina High School, 24-13 in its season opener on Aug. 16. The big game on everyone’s schedule will be the inaugural Bonita-San Dimas flag football “Smudge Crown” Rivalry Game on Monday, Sept. 9.

“This is an exciting time for our female athletes, who have been looking forward to playing in their own football league for many years,” Bonita Unified Superintendent Matt Wien said. “It’s wonderful to see the competitive spirit and camaraderie displayed by our scholar-athletes, who are always trying to push themselves to greater heights. We wish the best of luck to both of our flag football teams.”

### PHOTOS:

**BUSD\_FLAGFOOTBALL1:** Sisters Breanna and Ashley Sandmark, seniors at Bonita High and San Dimas High, respectively, will face off on the field as part of their school’s flag football teams during the inaugural “Smudge Crown” game.

**BUSD\_FLAGFOOTBALL2:** San Dimas High School flag football players hone their skills during a practice as girls flag football makes its official CIF Southern Section debut this August, after a year as a pilot program.

**BUSD\_FLAGFOOTBALL3:** Bonita High School flag football players get a workout as they prepare for their inaugural CIF Southern Section flag football season, which debuts in August after a year as a pilot program.

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