

# YMCA Flag Football Achievement is a Family Affair

**From the Y Archives – December 2023**

When Manja Brower joined the Marysville Family YMCA over a decade ago, she was looking for a safe place to leave her young children, so she could work out.

“The Y Kids Zone was the first place that I left my babies,” said Manja Brower. “The Y’s caring staff made it easy and knowing I was close by if they needed me helped me take that step. I was able to get a little break, work out, and know that the kids were having a lot of fun.”

Like many families, the Browsers joined the Y for the fitness opportunities and the free Kids Zone benefit, but once they registered for youth sports, they discovered so much more.

“Our family has always been avid skiers, but I wanted them to experience team sports,” said Manja Brower. “My daughter, Paityn, saw flag football advertised at the Y and I thought, ‘why not?’ It was a good fit for both of my kids.”

The first season of flag football, Paityn, now 13, and her brother Andrew, now 11, could be on the same team which was appealing to the busy family. They all quickly learned how fun and rewarding participating in YMCA youth sports could be.

Paityn, a stand-out running back and wide receiver, has achieved so much in her two seasons of flag football. She’s discovered that she’s really good at a sport she loves, but she’s also developed so many skills that she takes with her off of the field.

“I love the adrenaline that you get when you’re competing and people on the sidelines and your teammates are cheering you on,” said Paityn Brower. “I really like encouraging my teammates and helping others, especially other girls on the team.”

Flag football is growing in popularity, especially among girls. Earlier this fall, the Seattle Seahawks announced \$117,000 in new grant funding to support the launch of girls’ flag football teams at 30 high schools across the region. The Y’s flag football program is co-ed, but as more girls learn about the sport, the goal is to have a girls-only league in the near future.

“The experience is definitely worth it,” said Paityn Brower. “I would encourage more girls to come out and try something new. There is a place for everyone.”

Manja has seen the valuable lessons that her children have learned on the football field, including sportsmanship, dealing with wins and losses, and treating others with respect. Manja also stepped out of her comfort zone and became an assistant coach.

“I’ve always loved watching football, but I didn’t have the qualifications or the confidence to coach,” said Manja Brower. “The other coaches were so encouraging and willing to help. I’ve gained so much confidence. I’ve loved learning more about football, but I think I enjoy connecting with the kids and families the most.”

Manja plans to assist again in the spring. The whole family has found their place through youth sports, building relationships with other families and developing new friendships at school.

“It’s a busy world and we can sometimes feel lonely,” said Manja Brower. “The community we’ve found and the invaluable things we’ve all achieved through flag football is so much bigger than just the sport.”

To learn more about the Y or register for spring flag football, please visit [ymca-snoco.org](http://ymca-snoco.org). New members receive \$0 Join Fee during the month of January.