

## CHICAGO FORCE FOOTBALL

# Katie Romano: Overcoming the odds

BY ROSS FORMAN

Her size alone is an obstacle.

At 5'2" and 125 pounds, Katie Romano is the smallest player on the Chicago Force, perhaps the whole Independent Women's Football League (IWFL).

But that's hardly an issue to this 24-year-old who graduated from Bartlett High School in 2004 and still lives in the western suburb. She is, you see, in her first season with the Force, although a few years ago she had a stint with the DC Divas in our nation's capital, when the Divas won the league championship.

That was when and where she attended Gallaudet University, the school she graduated from in 2009. Gallaudet is one of the top schools in liberal education and career development for deaf and hard-of-hearing undergraduate students.

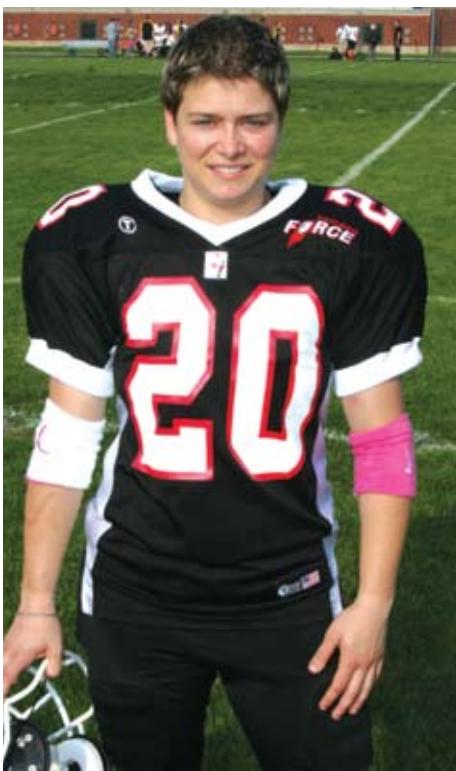
Yes, Romano is deaf.

"I love football; it's my passion. I love challenges and physical sports. Since I don't have a job [right now], I'm considering football as my job," said Romano, who played four years of soccer in high school and four more years in college. "I joined [the] Divas football team in 2006, but stopped because I was in college. So, after I graduated and came back home, I just missed football a lot. I love the feeling of wearing [a] helmet and pads. I love hitting too."

"I'm proud to represent the Chicago Force; this team is very addicted."

Romano, who sees action on offense, defense and special teams, admits she was nervous when she joined the Force this season—mostly because she did not have an interpreter.

"But I was fine after [a] few practices because



**Katie Romano. Photo by Ross Forman**

my team made me feel like part of family right away," she said.

Now, she has an interpreter who stands right alongside the Force coaches.

"Each [preseason] practice, one by one, players came to me and introduced themselves until we had [a] scrimmage game and then a post-scrimmage party; that's when I felt more part of the team because hanging out with the team off the field helps to get to know the players on the team," said Romano, who was born deaf. "I get along with everyone on the team pretty easily. Cassie [Cattouse] and I are closer because we hang out often and we carpool all the time." [Cattouse is hearing, but learning sign language—and Romano is her teacher.]

Romano, a lesbian who said she is now dating, said she always is nervous on game day. However, it's an excited nervousness.

The team has created football signs for the plays to aide Romano.

"It's tough when the ball is up in the air behind my back and everyone is yelling, 'Pass, pass, pass,'" she said. "I can't hear, so I have to read the wide receiver's eyes and body if the ball is coming or not, and I have to react fast when I see the ball."

Clearly, Romano is a role-model for the deaf community—and beyond. What may seem impossible, isn't—as she can attest.

So it's no wonder she dreams big on the football field.

"I really want to be like Devon Hester [of the Chicago Bears]—to catch the kickoff and return it for a touchdown," she said.

#### A little more Katie Romano...

- Favorite pro sport: Football
- Favorite pro team: Chicago Bears
- Favorite pro athlete: Devon Hester
- Favorite movie: Avatar
- Favorite TV show: "I don't watch TV anymore."

—It's a fact: A member on USA Deaf National Women soccer team since 2004, and she attended the Deaflympic in Melbourne, Australia, (2005) and Taipei, Taiwan (2009). "We won gold medals both years and I'm planning to go for third gold in Athens, Greece, in 2013."

—On the 2010 Chicago Force: "We have really good team and everyone is young and fun."

—Quote: "It doesn't matter being deaf or not, don't let anyone or anything stop your dream or passion of doing something."

—Goals: "My goal for the team is to keep driving all the way to the championship together as one. Personally, I want to serve in Peace Corps, so right now I'm in [the] process with the nomination for position as special education [teacher] in Africa. I have accomplished so many things, but I'm never satisfied because there are countless things out there I can do, so I'm living up my life as much I can everyday and seek for more challenges."

The Force's final regular-season game is June 5 at the Kansas City Tribe.

while growing up.

"I really idolized my sister when she played," said Burke, now 28. "I have to thank her," for his love of volleyball.

That's indoor, outdoor and of course the beach version as well.

He is now the competitive volleyballer; she is now a stay-at-home mom, though she does still play at times.

Burke, who ran cross country and played basketball at Sycamore High School, now lives in Lake View and is a healthcare consultant for Tennessee-based ProClaim.

"I'm a natural athlete. Plus, I'm 6'5," and height certainly helps in volleyball, and I really love team sports," said Burke who graduated from high school in 2000 and the University of Illinois in 2004.

Burke—who ran the Chicago Marathon in 2006 and 2007, and is training for this October's 26.2-mile event—will be in Cologne, Germany, in July for Gay Games VIII. He is part of the 10-member Chicago Defiance indoor volleyball team that also features Scott Parachek, Tony Akers, William Boulware and Brian Elizondo, among others. The team also features a player from Philadelphia and one from Hawaii.

"I think this team can [win] a medal. We have a solid team, so hopefully things will come together for us," said Burke, making his debut in the quadrennial Games. "I've heard the Gay Games is an amazing experience, so I can't wait to see the sights and sounds, and getting to meet people from all over the world, with so many different backgrounds all coming together around sports will be great."

Nervous?

"No; I'm just energized to go. It will be a great time to just have fun," Burke said. "The guys who I'm going with ... that's who will make the trip. It's just a fun group who I love to be around."

Burke also has never been to Germany, and naturally is excited for the sight-seeing.

Burke, like the rest of his Defiance teammates, plays volleyball year-round. He is a middle hitter who also can play outside hitter.

So yes, he will be spiking the competition in Cologne.

Burke admits one of his on-court strengths is, "my ability to put the ball down."

#### More about Andy Burke:

—Favorite sports (beside volleyball): Baseball and college basketball

—Cubs or White Sox? Cubs. "I've lived by Wrigley Field for four years and I go to a lot of games. You can hear Take Me Out To The Ballgame [from my home]."

—Favorite Cubs: Ryan Dempster, Derrek Lee and Alfonso Soriano

—Favorite TV shows: Law & Order: SVU and The Biggest Loser

—Favorite movies: Forrest Gump and Shawshank Redemption

—Hobbies: "Anything active; I love being outside. I love going to the beach in the summer."

—Favorite local bar: Sidetrack. "My best friend works there."

—Status: Single, "and always looking for a quality man, [which is] hard work."

## 13.1 Marathon June 13

The half-marathon event known as 13.1 Marathon® Chicago will take place Sunday, June 13.

The 13.1 Marathon® Chicago starts and finishes at the Historic South Shore Cultural Center (SSCC) on Chicago's South Side. There will be 10 water and Gatorade stations along the course and at the start/finish.

The race is part of a series of 13.1 Marathon events that will take place in cities such as Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Minneapolis, Minn.; and Boston. See [www.131marathon.com](http://www.131marathon.com).

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**Andy Burke. Photo by Ross Forman**