

Hometown: Sheboygan, Wis.
Residence: Denver, Colo.
Age: 30
Height: 5-5
Year on U.S. National Team: 1st
Pronunciation:
 Lacey ABELL (AY-bull)



A LIFE IN FOOTBALL

Abell played plenty of sports early in her life, but football stuck. She even had some early successes competing against other girls her age.

“I grew up playing any and all sports with my dad and brother,” Abell said. “Football was what we played most with kids in the neighborhood. I also got involved in Punt, Pass, & Kick (a youth football skills competition) early on. I took first place in the state in my age division in Punt, Pass, & Kick in 2003, 2005 and 2007. In 2003, the winners in each division got to go to Lambeau Field (home of the NFL’s Green Bay Packers) and throw a pass at halftime. I also got to high-five Brett Favre and Donald Driver, which was definitely a highlight for my nine-year-old self.”

Abell began making a name for herself in the flag football space near the end of her time in high school. She started playing quarterback for the first time in seven-on-seven tournaments at 17 years old in Hmong festivals in Wisconsin.

“It’s just one of my favorite sports and one of my favorite things in the world,” Abell said. “I love the people on the teams I play with, the sense of camaraderie and the shared goal we have when we play. I also love the challenge of competing against great teams and great players.”

TRANSITION TO FLAG

Abell has been playing flag football for 12 years, including three years traveling to tournaments with a consistent team. She believes many skills have translated across flag and tackle football to make her a better player.

“I think there are a significant number of skills that translate like route running, catching, defensive back drills, throwing at quarterback and footwork,” Abell said. “I think some of the most helpful skills that translated are the cognitive things and play schemes. For instance, understanding what defense the other team is running, what weaknesses that defense has, watching film to see what teams struggle with and how to capitalize on that offensively. Film study with knowledgeable coaches was something new to me when I played tackle, and I thought it was so incredibly helpful in preparing for games and feeling confident.”



COMFORTABLE IN A SCRUM

Abell played flag football at the intramural level at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, but rugby took center stage for three years. Her team claimed first place in a seven-on-seven rugby tournament called Nash Bash, in Nashville, Tenn., and she earned a spot on the Wisconsin U23 select team in 2016.

“I also played scrum half for two of the three years which I usually describe to people as the ‘quarterback’ of rugby, and it includes some decision making and directing of play, which I think helped with some of the team traits and responsibilities required of a quarterback in football,” Abell said. “I also played some running back in tackle, and I think rugby helped me not only with footwork but also helped me learn how to take hits while running, stiff arm people and get low to drive through contact.”



MAKE THE TACKLE

After college, Abell moved to Denver and began playing women’s tackle football for the Mile High Blaze. In 2022, she and the Blaze won the Women’s Football Alliance’s National Championship in Canton, Ohio.

“[My experience in] rugby absolutely made me a better tackler. When I joined rugby, the first thing emphasized for rookies was safe and effective tackling and how to tuck when getting tackled. They taught the most effective ways to tackle and had us run many drills on getting low, driving and taking someone down properly,” Abell said. “In rugby, without the pads this is so incredibly important. Once I got to tackle football with pads, it felt almost easy to be comfortable hitting someone with all the padded protection.”

COACH ‘EM UP

Abell is also an accomplished coach. She has worked with Arvada West High School’s girls’ flag football team in Arvada, Colo. for the past two years. In 2022, Arvada West won the Broncos Girls High School Flag Football tournament, capturing the state title in the sport’s second year as a pilot program.

“I love coaching. I think it is so incredible to see younger girls growing up learning to play football, and I love being a part of that,” Abell said. “I think it is so cool to see the light bulb moment of them figuring out a skill or executing something at a higher level after practicing it for a while. Seeing our girls win the state title felt as good, maybe even better than any title I’ve ever won. I was so incredibly proud of them and so glad to see all their hard work pay off in the title game. It was such an incredible experience.”

