

Girls Can't Play Rugby - Morgan Parker (Aged 12)

“Girls can't play rugby!”

Not this again! All my life I've heard the same thing, from my family, my friends and now from Aaron Tyler, the captain of our school's rugby team. I'd once thought of him as potential boyfriend material, but right now I wanted to punch him.

“What do you mean we can't play rugby? Why?”

“You're too delicate! Why don't you stick to painting your nails, babe?”

He did not just say that?! Around us, his friends were cackling like a pack of hyenas. I'd show him, I'd show all of them! I'd never been a stereotypical girl. I preferred jeans to dresses, and anything pink or frilly was enough to make me break out in a rash! I had no interest in dolls or make-up. All I'd wanted, from the age of six, was to play rugby. I'd watched from the sidelines as my older brother played. It was so unfair! I'd asked my parents, begged them, to let me play but each time the answer was the same - no.

“It's too dangerous!”

“You'll be hurt!”

When my brother came home covered in bruises every week they didn't seem too concerned. If anything, they looked proud. At school, I'd asked why we couldn't play rugby instead of netball but, again, I hit a brick wall. It just wasn't the done thing. And yet I knew that wasn't the case. I'd Googled ‘women's rugby’ and knew that, even though it wasn't as high profile as men's rugby, it had been played for over a hundred years. The first women's Rugby World Cup was even held in Wales for goodness sake! My searches lead me to Emily Valentine. She was Irish, not Welsh, and was born in the nineteenth century, but our situations were very similar. She had convinced society to let her play the sport she loved, and so would I!

With Aaron Tyler and his friends' laughter echoing in my ears, I decided to organise a campaign to make rugby part of our school's curriculum. There was a petition for the school governors with hundreds of signatures and I even organised a small sit-in protest on the rugby pitch. Okay, I wasn't exactly Rosa Parks, but I was determined! Eventually, more and more people came round to the idea and two months later we found ourselves walking out for our first game - against the boys!

Aaron and his friends were laughing and wolf-whistling as we walked onto the field, but that didn't put us off. If anything, it made us more determined. We'd fought so hard to get there that there was no way we would be beaten now. Eighty minutes later, the smug grins were well and truly wiped off their faces after losing to a bunch of ‘delicate’ girls. Aaron asked me out. I told him to ask again when he learned how to play rugby.