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The NFL's choice to hire a female referee

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Sarah Thomas as referee has caused NFL players to question her in the position. (Photo courtesy of NoteRSS)

Starting in the 2015 NFL season, expect to see a woman breaking up a pile of football players after a play. Sarah Thomas will be the first official female full-time referee for the NFL.

Finally women are breaking down the gender barrier in male-dominated sports. Men should actually be happy that Thomas became the NFL's newest referee.

Sarah Thomas, a mother of three boys, started officiating high school football in 1999 and moved her way up to officiating Conference USA football games.

After the NFL announced the hire, Thomas and the NFL have received criticism from football players. Jacksonville Jaguars defensive tackle Sen'Derrick Marks believes that the NFL only hired her out of "great publicity," and it is "all about monopolizing every opportunity."

Marks has no authority to make any comments regarding Thomas's hiring. He gets paid millions of dollars to do something that he loves. Thomas is *also* doing something that she loves but gets backlash. What kind of double standard is this?

People believe that after recent domestic violence scandals, the NFL is trying to win back its female audience by diversifying the organization.

Marks commented that there "ain't nothing wrong with it, especially as long as she knows what she's doing."

Really, Marks? I'm pretty sure she knows *exactly* what she is doing if the NFL hired her. Actually, you must be *very* good to officiate a NFL football game.

It is unfair for people to assume that Thomas only got the job because of the NFL's supposed publicity stunt. Maybe she received the job because she is a fair and honest football referee. If the NFL hired a male referee, would people question him on whether he knew what he was

doing? I don't think so! In a previous ESPNW interview, Thomas has even said that "[she] does this because [she] loves it."

Thomas does not even appear noticeably female when she officiates a game. In previous interviews, she mentioned how she was told to put her hair under her cap and not wear makeup. Her referee outfit is also not tailored to be flattering to a female body. I'm sure the more masculine she appears, the less ridicule she receives.

I tell the NFL to allow Thomas to put down the hair! Tailor her outfit! Allow her to be proud of who she is!

It is obvious that more people will question the calls that Thomas makes because she is a woman. Whenever there is a new change against the norm, fans will begin to question it. Football is considered a "manly" sport just like ballet is considered a "female" sport. When either of these genders participates in a sport that is stereotyped as either male or female, it creates a rise in suspicion. In this case, there has never been a female to officiate a male sport. It is not surprising that fans and players will question Thomas's qualifications and think that her hire was a publicity stunt. I am sure that Thomas will receive additional pressure and taunting now that she is in the big leagues. It shouldn't have to be this way.

Having more female officials in any sport will change the dynamic of the game. Women are perceived as being more compassionate and fair when it comes to decision-making. If there would were more female officials, would there be more fair calls? Football is an intense sport. There is yelling, hitting, and cussing. You name it — in football, they do it. Can having more female football referees reduce the amount of yelling and aggression that happens on a football field? Maybe... Who knows?

Regardless of whether it's a publicity stunt or not, this is exactly what females need in sports. Finally women can be involved in other ways than just as sideline cheerleaders. Sarah Thomas has paved the path for future female referees.

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