



Squad Picture: The Citronauts pose for the camera at their first appearance at the NIRSA national championship tournament in Pensacola, Florida. Photo courtesy of Tory Glenn.

Pulling Flags, Taking Names

What started as an outlet for fraternity brothers to play flag football together during the 2013 Greek ban has evolved into one of the most successful sports teams on campus. The Citronauts hit their stride and competed in back-to-back national championships.

by **Dimitrios Tzamaras**

One of the most successful sports teams at the University of Central Florida isn't a varsity team, or even a club team. In fact, they don't even practice. The Citronauts are a co-recreational flag football team that has represented UCF at the NIRSA Flag Football National Championships in the past two years. The dominant stretch by the team, which was capped with a top-six finish last season at the national tournament, was the result of the Greek ban on campus in 2013. "We couldn't play as our frat in the spring of 2013, so myself and some of the guys from Sigma Pi decided to make a 4-on-4 men's team and name it the Citronauts, as a funny play on the old mascot for UCF," Tyler Smith, the original team's founder, said.

After a successful season of men-only competition in the spring of 2013, they decided to team up with Alpha Delta Pi sorority sisters to form an 8-on-8 co-recreational team when fall rolled around. "Other people have come along as the team has grown, but it's always been mostly a combination of Sigma Pi and ADPi [members]," current team captain Kelton Williams said. The team was successful in their first year together, advancing all the way to the quarter finals at the UCF tournament held at the end of the intramural season. "We realized that we had played so awful, but the games were still so close," Smith said. "We knew if we could just do the little things right we could be an awesome team." One of the biggest keys to any co-recreational sports team is the strength of the female players on the roster. "We used to always say, 'Your team is only as good as your worst girl,'" Colby Maffei, a Citronaut and UCF ADPi alumna, said. "It's the most important part of co-rec, and we were fortunate enough to have very, very strong girls on our team." Maffei played college soccer at LSU before transferring to UCF.

The following season would be their first run to the national tournament, but heading into the season, all they could think about

was getting through the UCF league and winning a championship. "I don't think any of us had been thinking about any sort of national tournament after that last game," Smith said. "We had just been focused on beating the team that had kind of run the IM league at UCF." After a loss in their first game of that fall 2014 season, the Citronauts went undefeated the rest of the way, including a win by one touchdown in the championship game to stamp their first ticket to nationals in Pensacola. "After the game we all went out to Pub and had a good time dancing on tables with our IM championship tee-shirts," Maffei said. "That first championship year was incredible," Smith said. "I remember hoisting Colby up on my shoulders because of how excited I was after the game."

UCF has a strong relationship with the NIRSA organization, which is responsible for holding the national intramural championships for various sports. The UCF intramural championship winners automatically qualify for NIRSA tournaments. The Citronauts ended up with a top-15 finish at their first national appearance, and it left them hungry for what was to come.

The next semester, however, Smith tore his ACL and spent a good chunk of the next fall season at less than 100 percent physically. "All I could think about during my rehab was going to Pensacola one more time," Smith said. "When we were able to win that second championship, I cried. My friends on the team made fun of me, but I couldn't help it." Their second appearance in Pensacola ended with a much-improved top-six finish, and Smith, along with other graduating seniors, passed the torch down to Williams and the younger Citronauts. The most important thing to the predecessors is the camaraderie and friendships strengthened through the sport. "It's something a couple of us got to have a fun time with," Smith said. "It kind of pumps them up as something to try their own hand at. If they can do that, that's great. If not, they're going to have this one night a week where they get to have fun. Flag football is just plain fun at the end of the day."