



WNY Flash Mob

By Jeffrey Levine

Next time you're at Sahlen's Stadium to attend a WNY Flash match, be sure to look up to section 118, or, better yet, just listen. That's because section 118 is home to the WNY Flash Mob and with all the chants and cheers and noise coming from the north end of the stadium, it'll be hard not to notice them next season.

Easy to recognize but difficult to encompass, the Flash Mob is listed as the official supporter's group of the WNY Flash but they're best described by a person who has experienced the rush of cheering for her team side by side with other fans.

"We're a visible and audible source of support and positive energy for the team so that they know that their hard work, skill, and talent does not go unappreciated," Sarah Black, a member of the Flash Mob explained. "It enables a community of soccer fans to connect with each other, cheer together, commiserate together, create tifos together and travel to games together. Those fans who don't want to sit back and be passively entertained can get involved and be part of the game."

Tifo, an Italian word now understood as a passionate display of support for a team, is the ideal way to define what the Flash Mob fosters. Despite back to back to back champi-

onships, however, things at Sahlen's Stadium were not always so boisterous.

"I got involved in the Mob after the championship game when I went out with some other season ticket holders

and we talked about how quiet the stands were during the game and throughout the season," Sabrina Beach, a member of the Flash Mob, explained. "There were a few times during the season I had someone tell me to stop cheering because I was into the game too much. They shushed me. If you watch international or European League games, they're never quiet. They're singing, they're banging drums. That's what I expected. To have someone turn around and shush me felt a little strange. The team was too good not to have the fan support."

Danielle Spayde, another member of the Flash Mob, took her assessment a step farther: "I was at the 2013 NWSL Championship here in Rochester and the Portland Thorns had fans fly in and they were louder than the rest of the stadium filled with Flash fans. I think that the Thorns were able to pull that win off partially due to their fan support."

In 2014, lack of fan noise certainly won't be a problem. With a membership base that is growing every day, the Flash Mob continues to expand and adapt and evolve. Depending on who you ask, even the name of supporters oscillates between Mobbers and Mobsters. Joining the Flash Mob is an opportunity to not only share in the traditions of fellow soccer fans in the region, but to also help create new traditions for future fans.

"I think what's important is that the Flash Mob is very organic, very grassroots, and above all very open

to ANY who would like to join in whatever ways they can," Matt Shields, one of many male Mobsters said. "Whether that is coming to a viewing party for a U.S. Women's National Team match, or tailgating before home games, or exchanging 'playful banter' with other women's soccer fans... Any and all should feel welcome, because they are, as I found out myself."

"If they want to cheer with us they're more than welcome to," Beach agreed. "If we don't have enough room in the section we'll make room."

Looking ahead to next season, the Mobbers already have some ambitious plans in place. They are trying to raise enough funds to distribute song and chant sheets, get noisemakers at the games and take a road trip in order to, in Beach's words, show opposing fans "how it's supposed to be done."

Buffalo and Rochester may not be the biggest cities but members of the Flash Mob are certain that they can make their mark on women's soccer.

"I think that being from a smaller market like Western New York it is important to focus on quality rather than quantity," Shields said. "There will always be larger cities with bigger populations to draw from but where I think we can and will shine is in our dedication, creativity, openness and the sheer joy in, and appreciation for, seeing soccer being played at the highest level in our hometown."

Even if you have season or single-game tickets elsewhere, the Flash Mob invites you to stop by section 118, visit their website, wnyflashmob.com, join their facebook page and follow their twitter account. As Black remarked, "The best team in the league deserves to have the best fans out there showing their support!"