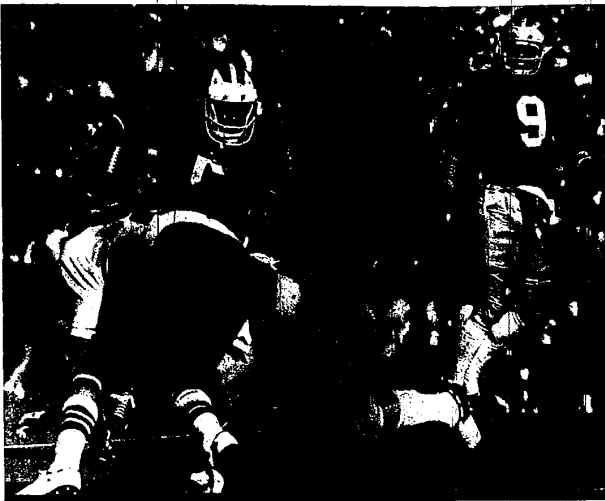


The gridiron action's stayed pretty much the same for years now — a punt, pass, and kick through the swirling winds of social change that swept over college campuses in the '60's and early '70's. But on the fringes of the action, a few new twists have been added. At the University of Michigan, one innovation was the introduction of women to the once male-only marching band two years ago and this year the formation of a pom pon girl squad. One of the pom pon people seems to have been made for the job: she spent her youth . . .



. . . Growing up cheerleader



Photographed by Gary Friedman

By BARBARA CORNELL
When it comes to cheerleading, Sharon Hamlett is a lifer. She first tasted the heady fruits of her passion as a junior high school cheerleader. Caught up in the momentum, she continued on the squad through her senior high school years in Farmington Hills. Now Sharon, a junior nursing student at the University of Michigan, is unrelenting in her school spirit.

SHE'D PREFER being a cheerleader, of course, but Sharon says she's glad to be a UM pom pon girl (or person, if you prefer). "It's a great way to make friends, and you learn so much more than inside the classroom," she explains. "When you go to 'the Big U' you have to feel like a part of it."

Sharon savors the glamor of her work, but adds, "there's a lot of hard work and extra hours involved in being a pom pon girl."

She and her crew practice nearly 15 hours a week. Shocking orange gym shorts and white polo shirt blur through the air as Sharon begins a series of mind-and-body-bending gyrations which would probably send the average, non-athletic individual into a muscular state not far short of catatonic — she dismisses them as "limbering exercises."

Despite her obvious athletic prowess, Sharon's no refugee weight-lifter, and her reserved manner is unexpected from someone in a traditionally extroverted role.

It's tough for Sharon, who carries a full load in school, to fit all her activities into a single day. She uses daily schedules to

keep pace with her work. She tends to "feel like a robot," she says, but she finds time to fit her work and squeeze in a few breaths of relaxation on the side.

One of her passions is football. "I love it," she says, her arms waving wildly for added emphasis. She hasn't taken to reserving the sorority house television for Monday night football yet, but she's hooked on catching the Big Ten scoreboard.

"If I were just a regular spectator, I probably wouldn't be so close to the game. You're so close to what's going on when you're on the field that you can't help getting involved."

Sharon readily shuns the pom pon girl stereotype. "They have an image of not caring what's going on," she sighs in dismay. "That's just not true. All the girls are very athletically oriented."

Diane Mather, one of Sharon's teammates and another Farmington Hills resident, enjoys being a pom pon girl for much the same reasons. As a dancer and experienced gymnast, Diane's responsible for much of the squad's choreography.

Working under what she calls a "pressure schedule," Diane can provide a workable routine in three days. Her major interests lie in dance, and the pom pon girls provide her with a means of keeping in shape while not stifling her creativity.

Sharon asserts that, while a pom pon person's life isn't just "sunshine and roses." But if Michigan's men go to the Rose Bowl, the girls in white are sure to follow, and Pasadena at New Year's is a whole lot closer to sunshine and roses than Ann Arbor.



SHARON HAMLETT



DIANE MATHER

They're strutting over new turf

By BARBARA CORNELL
If thoughts of pom pon girls conjure up images of luscious leggy creatures with nothing better to do than strut their stuff in the name of school spirit, you've got a long way to go, baby. For the University of Michigan's pom pon girls — or people, as they're officially known — their activity represents a discipline, an escape from the academic doldrums, and a means to keep physically fit. The 10 girls put on a polished show in their first football season, despite the ravages of a fierce battle with U-M regents, faculty, and students.

Opponents of the pom pon cause contend the girls were concocted to please "national television's sex hungry audience of armchair quarterbacks." But the pom pon girls disagree. They contend their function is to provide spectators with something new to watch. They insist they're entertainers. And the pom pon girls in their flashing white uniforms do tend to pick up where the touchdowns leave off.

ACCORDING TO ONE irate pom pon girl, criticism flows most heavily from women, both students and alumni. "What they don't realize is how hard we worked to get in the position we are in today," she argues. "I've heard people say we're a giant step backward for woman's liberation, but by breaking this elitist, sexist tradition, I think we have taken a giant step forward."

Male on-lookers often view the pom pon girls in a traditionally belittling stereotype. **A POM PON GIRL** said she was tired of hearing alumni men constantly remark, "Wow, we never had pom pon girls like that when I was in school," as they carefully peruse her body. The girls also get university-sponsored body guards while on the football field, to prevent high-spirited fans from passing them up the stands.

Whether Michigan's pom people really have come a long way is still a subject of heated campus debate. But critics and boosters alike agree on one thing: the girls on the field have added a nice bit of trim to Saturday afternoons in Ann Arbor.



Michigan's new twist on the gridiron: pom pon girls