

# Kelly McGillis Classic Tournament Makes a World of Difference

Two Afghan asylees will attend the largest international women's flag football tournament held in Key West on January 22–29, 2024



# IWFFA

## International Women's Flag Football Association

**Key West, Florida Dec 22, 2023 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com))** - The annual [Kelly McGillis Classic tournament](#), presented in part by the [Monroe County Tourist Development Council](#), is only six weeks away. Held each year in Key West, the women's international flag football championships are celebrating their 32nd year with a weeklong event on January 22-29, 2024. Tournament games are played on January 26-28, followed by the Annual World Challenge Game which pits the USA All Stars vs. the International All Stars. Register for the [tournament](#), which has two special participants from IWFFA Afghan Flag Football who received asylum in Mexico.

Women from El Salvador, Guam, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Morocco, India, Sweden, and the United States will attend.

For thirty years, the tournament has had a tremendous impact on women around the world. The International Women's Flag Football Association ([IWFFA](#)) was established because of the Kelly McGillis Classic tournament. Founder Diane Beruldsen created an organization for women around the world to experience what women flag football players enjoyed each year at the Kelly McGillis Classic.

## History

Diane Beruldsen founded the International Women's Flag Football Association in 1997, combining

international and national teams across the United States. Diane had the vision of a worldwide organization, run by women and for women and girls only, that would introduce flag football around the globe. The IWFFA started its global outreach by introducing the sport in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland in the 1990s and later in Cuba, Guatemala, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Afghanistan. There are teams in Canada, India, Egypt, Scotland, Mexico, and Puerto Rico, and new teams are planned for New Zealand, Pakistan, and Thailand.

### **IWFFA Tournaments in 2023**

The flagship tournament of the Association is the Kelly McGillis Classic. After starting the year with their 31st annual tournament, IWFFA participated in tournaments all over the world, starting with Guam.

Guam is the first location in the Pacific Asia Region to be a part of the IWFFA. Diane Beruldsen spent ten days in the territory in March 2023, helping the women launch the Flag Football Ladies Association of Guam (FFLAG). The goal of IWFFA is that the new league will increase women's empowerment and provide opportunities for leadership. After a successful time in Guam, IWFFA traveled to the following locations for tournaments:

- Honduras
- Mexico
- Cuba
- Boston, MA
- Morocco
- El Salvador
- Sweden
- Provincetown, MA
- Guatemala

In each country, IWFFA volunteers hold clinics and train women to play, coach, officiate, and manage the sport, developing healthy programs for female athletes. The organization also offers scholarships, connects players with teams, and hosts tournaments around the globe.

### **Humanitarian Opportunities**

The journey of the Afghan women's flag football team to Mexico is a remarkable story of resilience and international cooperation.

This story began in 2018 when Diane Beruldsen traveled to India to train women and introduce the sport to Afghan women. The Afghan women brought the sport to their country, establishing the Women Flag Football Federation (AWFFF), with many women playing, coaching, and organizing. However, in 2021 when the United States pulled out of Afghanistan and the Taliban took over, the situation for women and women athletes became dire. The AWFFF contacted Beruldsen to see if she could help, and the IWFFA launched an amazing effort to get women to Mexico.

Beruldsen worked with Bridget Cambria, an immigration lawyer and former IWFFA player, whose non-profit organization ALDEA worked on asylum cases for Afghan women. They partnered with Elba Gutierrez of Greenberg & Traurig in Mexico who were also working with refugees. This partnership was crucial in providing the necessary support for Afghan women and their families. Programa Casa Refugiados provided housing, assisted with food, helped the Afghans enroll in school, assisted in job searches, and even arranged for a flag football field.

The chaos in Afghanistan made the Mexican government's agreement to take in the Afghan women and their families even more significant. The Catholic Church also played a vital role in arranging the flag football field, highlighting the collective effort and support from various organizations and individuals.

Diane Beruldsen described how she felt, seeing the Afghan women arrive at the airport in Mexico:

*It was important for me to be there when the Afghans arrived. For them to see a friendly face, and I wanted to be there to see our Afghan flag football players and their families, after 15 months of hard work. I just had to see for myself this first group to make it. This moment and this experience I should cherish for the rest of my life. When the families started coming out of the gate, I felt very happy for them, very proud, and thought how lucky we were to have all the pro bono lawyers on our team, for without any one of them, who knows if we would have been successful.*

In all, 73 Afghan flag football players and their families received asylum in Mexico.

The IWFFA is delighted to announce that two Afghan asylees will attend the 2024 Kelly McGillis Classic tournament. One will present at the Women's Speaker Series and the other will speak at the opening ceremonies. This is an incredible opportunity for tournament attendees to hear their stories and learn about how flag football is changing lives around the world.

### **The 2024 Kelly McGillis Classic**

Registration is now open for the [Kelly McGillis Classic tournament](#).

Teams interested in the Kelly McGillis Classic are invited to compete by registering on the IWFFA.com [website](#). Individual women who want to be part of the Loose Women's Team can email [iwffa@iwffa.com](mailto:iwffa@iwffa.com). Interested sponsors can contact the organization by emailing [iwffa@iwffa.com](mailto:iwffa@iwffa.com). The IWFFA Inc. is a non-profit 501 (C)3 organization and donations are tax deductible. Don't miss the 32nd Kelly McGillis Classic promotional video:

<https://youtu.be/y-Ox-j1vMA8?si=IAbA3wuT-Dy8W0bY>

For more information on this topic, please contact Stephanie Carnes at [stephanie@lmc.group](mailto:stephanie@lmc.group).

### **Media Contact**

The LMC Groups

[stephanie@lmc.group](mailto:stephanie@lmc.group)

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