

GHS grad will be at Super Bowl cheering on the Pats

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GILFORD — When our beloved New England Patriots take on the horrid G-men on Super Bowl Sunday in Indianapolis, their spirits will be buoyed by a team of cheerleaders that includes Britni Baron, a 22 year-old Gilford native and graduate of Gilford High School.

Baron, the daughter of Kent and Robin Baron, is currently in her second year as a member of the New England Patriots cheerleading squad. However, her cheerleading career came as a surprise, especially to her.

For starters, Baron was born into a family that was more interested in professional hockey than football. Also, she had never done any cheering until she, on a whim, decided to attend an audition in Foxboro. That was in 2009, when she was a junior at the University of New Hampshire.

"I was so nervous, I didn't expect anything to come out of it," she recalled. There were more than 300 women at the audition, and only about one in 10 would make the team. "I was so shocked... When they did call my name, needless to say, I was excited," she said.

While growing up, Baron had been heavily involved in dance, dancing at local studios such as Edgewater Academy of Dance. She also played volleyball at Gilford High. Baron learned that NFL cheerleading relied more upon dance skills than high school-style cheerleading and found out that most of her colleagues came from a dance background.

Because she didn't expect to make the team, Baron hadn't thought about how she would juggle her new job with her full-time studies at UNH. Somehow she found a way, driving from Durham to Foxboro twice a week for practice and again for home games — the cheerleaders don't typically follow the team to away contests.

Being a member of an NFL cheerleading squad is a part-time, year-round job. In the off-season, Baron and her team mates fill their time with promotional appearances, take a trip to shoot photos for the team's swimsuit calendar, and then start rehearsing for the upcoming season.

Though they're all smiles during the games, Baron said there's plenty of sweating going on during rehearsals. For example, one of their training exercises has them jog around Gillette Stadium's seats, sprinting up every ramp. "You definitely have to be in shape," she said.

A highlight of the 2009 season for Baron was traveling with the team to London, where the Patriots played a game at Wembley Stadium. The Patriots were considered the "away" team, so she didn't perform during the game. She and her teammates went along, though, to promote the sport in the English capital.

Baron said cheering is a step out of her usual character. "I'm not typically overt about my life," she said, adding that she typically is an introverted



Britni Baron, a two-year veteran of the New England Patriots Cheerleading squad, is a native of Gilford and 2007 graduate of Gilford High School. (Justin Hammond/Courtesy photo)

person. Beyond her roommates and her closest friends, she didn't tell anyone at college about her glamorous part-time job. Her current day-job, working as an accountant for a Natick, Mass. company that provides long-term care, is more in line with her persona.

She's able to play the role of a NFL cheerleader, she said, because the atmosphere at Gillette Stadium is so over-the-top that she's able to suspend her usual inhibitions. "You feel so small when you're on the field, it almost feels surreal. It helps you come out of your shell," she said.

After her first year had concluded, Baron decided to take a break during her senior year so she could focus on academics. After graduating in May of 2011 with a degree in psychology, Baron went right back to cheering.

She's had a great year to cheer the Patriots, including watching Tom Brady and company win the AFC title. She and her fellow squad members lined up along the stage, taking a front-row position to watch owner Robert Kraft and other team representatives in their moment of glory, as confetti rained over them all. "That was an incredible feeling. We got to watch them get the trophy," she said.

As exciting as that was, she's looking forward even more to the Super Bowl, hoping to bear witness as the Patriots settle a four year-old grudge against the Giants. Baron isn't sure if she'll be on the field for the big game — some of the squad is assigned to make rounds through club rooms and suites — but she's sure that, whatever the outcome, she'll try out for a third year as a Patriots Cheerleader.

Baron said the team policy limits cheerleaders to three years on the team, so if she's back it will be for her last go-around. She's glad she acted on that whim in 2009, and to have the memories, friendships and travel opportunities that have followed. "I would love to be able to come back," she said. "It's amazing, to put it plain and simple."