

Katherine Rodriguez's speech for the 2019 Season Award Ceremony
My name is Katherine, but most of you know me as Kat.

I remember the first day so vividly. Darlenes and I both found out about YALD's organization through our internship. Both the NyPeer program and YALD, encouraged us to exercise and taught us the value in creating your own lifestyle. Its objective was to teach us the significance of eating right and how physical activity is important for one's mental health. We engaged in a series of exercises which were later followed by route running. As the days progressed, I became more and more interested in this league. I was determined to give it a try and because the location was so convenient, I had no excuse. When I first came to the summer training camp Darlenes and I felt overwhelmed with how many guys were on the field, we were filled with discomfort. But there was Carlos encouraging us to give it a try and to put our trust in him, and so we did. I thank you Carlos for believing in us and treating us equally. However, my friend Darlenes could not continue in this program and I was discouraged at first, but I chose to continue and have no regrets about my time on the field. I have grown individually and learned the importance of leadership because of my team. I want to thank my coaches Fernando, Richardo and Dave, and my amazing teammates (Mahmoudou, Joel, Michael, Sean, Raymond, Kenneth, and Anthony) for encouraging me to always believe in myself. Guys, all those Columbia late nights don't go unnoticed. I thank all the coaches throughout the teams for cheering me on in the sidelines and giving me the confidence and motivation after a missed catch or flag. These last few weeks have truly been full of different emotions, a blast and something to always look forward to throughout my week. At first, I felt like I did not belong... I would ask myself if I really belong here especially when that one guy would say this little girl could catch...you know who you are... despite us being the same age. However, I do not let challenges defeat me, I eat those. There was also a time; when Thomas Jefferson said "All men are created equal" Carlos meant that. I was fascinated at the respect everyone portrayed to the adults around them and to me. I may be a girl, but I am no different from any of you, we all enjoy playing football.

Thank you for your time.