Jen Welter (center) runs drills with NFL Arizona Cardinals players during football training camp, Aug. 1, 2015, in Glendale, Arizona. She will coach inside linebackers during training camp and four preseason games. Her internship with the team marks another barrier broken for women in sports. Photo: AP/Matt York

TEMPE, Arizona — Jen Welter accepts the title of trailblazer and embraces the chance to be a role model for girls. Perhaps most of all, though, she can't wait to get down to work when the Arizona Cardinals open training camp this weekend.

The job is a six-week internship coaching inside linebackers for the Cardinals, and she will only be there through training camp and the four preseason games. Nonetheless, it marks another barrier broken for women in sports.

Welter said she never dared entertain the thought of coaching in the National Football League.
"I didn't even dream that it was possible," she said at a news conference at Cardinals headquarters July 28. "I think the beauty of this is that, though it's a dream I never could have had, now it's a dream other girls can grow up and have. So I guess if that makes me a trailblazer, then..."

Cardinals coach Bruce Arians finished her sentence.

"She's a trailblazer," he said.

**Team Enthusiasm**

Team President Michael Bidwill said the move has the enthusiastic support of the organization, which has long been known for hiring minorities for management positions. Bidwill said he spoke Monday night with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, who congratulated the Cardinals on the move.

Known as Dr. Jen back in Texas, she has a doctorate in psychology and played for a season on a men's team, the Texas Revolution of the Indoor Football League.

There are a lot of people who are better than her at the X's and O's of football strategy, she said. "But the heart factor, the intelligent player factor, the being-the-person-with-the-motor-who-won't-quit factor, those are things I know I can add to."

Welter is the latest woman to enter what had been a men-only position. In April, the NFL announced that Sarah Thomas would be the league's first full-time female official. The NBA has had a female official for a long time. Also, Becky Hammon is an assistant with the San Antonio Spurs and recently was head coach of the Spurs team that won the Las Vegas Summer League championship.

"They Can Do Anything"

Welter said that for too long girls have been given the wrong message, that it is so important to be pretty.

"We show them as accessories, for no other better way to put it," she said. "We teach them very early on to be pretty, marry well and then act badly and you'll get on TV, and that's what they grow up thinking what fame is or success is.

"I want little girls to grow up knowing that when they put their minds to something, when they work hard, they can do anything."

**Prove It!**

The hiring stemmed from comments Arians made at the NFL owners meetings in Phoenix last March.
He was asked about the possibility of women coaching in the league. "The minute they can prove they can make a player better, they'll be hired," Arians said.

A short time later, the coach of the Texas Revolution men's team got in touch with Arians and said he knew someone who might fit that bill.

Arians called Welter and offered her one of the team's six internships, then he got the backing of General Manager Steve Keim and Bidwill. "He had to get all the right yeses but it was his heart that made it happen," Welter said, "and it was his belief that the Arizona Cardinals are the team that could handle this happening and that he has coaches on his staff that would embrace it and not cast me off to the side. You can't blaze a trail alone. Otherwise you're going to get stuck in the woods."

For The Love Of Football

Welter grew up in Vero Beach, Florida, and she told a story about when she could hardly see out of a helmet. She would have the family drag a mattress outside so she could have the bigger kids tackle her.

She played rugby at Boston College but football was her first love. She spent 14 years as a linebacker, most of them with the Dallas Diamonds of the Women's Football Alliance, and won two gold medals with the American team at the International Federation of American Football women's world championships.

Welter's first check, she said, came in 2004 — for $12, or $1 for each game she played. She still carries the check, which proved she was a pro.

A year ago, the first barrier fell for her when she played running back and on special teams for the Revolution. She became the first woman to play a non-kicking position on a men's professional football team. Last February, she became the first woman to coach for a men's professional team when the Revolution made her linebackers and special teams coach.

Then Arians called. She came over for the team's off-season workouts, the two of them met, "and I knew this was the type of person that I was looking for to start this," he said.

The coach said the internship is designed to give on-the-job-training as a steppingstone to get a full-time NFL job.

And of course that is exactly what Welter has her eye on.
Quiz

1 Which of the following details from the article is LEAST supportive of its central idea?

(A) Team President Michael Bidwill said the move has the enthusiastic support of the organization, which has long been known for hiring minorities for management positions.

(B) "I want little girls to grow up knowing that when they put their minds to something, when they work hard, they can do anything."

(C) A short time later, the coach of the Texas Revolution men’s team got in touch with Arians and said he knew someone who might fit that bill.

(D) "He had to get all the right yeses but it was his heart that made it happen," Welter said, "and it was his belief that the Arizona Cardinals are the team that could handle this happening and that he has coaches on his staff that would embrace it and not cast me off to the side.

2 Which of the following sentences is MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?

(A) Without the help of Coach Arians, Jen Welter never would have been given the opportunity to serve as a coach with the NFL.

(B) The six week internship Welters was hired for is designed to give on-the-job training as a steppingstone to get a full-time NFL job.

(C) Welter still carries the check she earned by playing with the Dallas Diamonds because it proves that she was a professional athlete.

(D) Welter’s success with the NFL will probably lead to other women being hired for coaching and management positions in men’s professional sports leagues.

3 The author suggests that which of the following is the MOST compelling reason Welter was hired?

(A) her gender

(B) her education and training in football strategy

(C) her passion and commitment

(D) her ability to play on a men’s team
4 Based on the information in the article, what prepared the Cardinals to be open-minded about hiring a female coach?

(A) their history of hiring minority candidates
(B) pressure from the press at the NFL owners meeting
(C) the support of the NFL commissioner
(D) Welter's prior experience coaching for a men's professional team