Alumni

Tech Worker by Day, NFL Cheerleader by Night

Jade Bucci ’25CC, a former Columbia computer-science major, leaps into her first season with the New England Patriots.

By
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|
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Photo illustration by *Columbia Magazine*. (Jade Bucci)

On a typical Monday evening, Jade Bucci ’25CC is clocking out of her day job in strategy and operations at a New York City tech start-up and catching the Amtrak for a four-hour ride to Boston. On Tuesdays, she works remotely from a friend’s house while reviewing choreography on her lunch break, and by around 6 p.m., she’s off to Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts, for practice. As a cheerleader for the New England Patriots, Bucci repeats a similar routine at least twice a week.

“I have a *Hannah Montana* life,” says Bucci, referring to the 2000s-era Disney Channel series in which Miley Cyrus plays a middle schooler who moonlights as a pop star. “I’m working one job during the majority of the day, and then when night comes around, I switch into my dance and cheer mode.”

Bucci joined the Patriots cheerleading squad in April, making the 2026–27 NFL season her first full term. As one of eight “rookies,” Bucci spent the past spring and summer training with the squad’s thirty other women and one man, learning dance routines and participating in promotional events. In June, Bucci broke in her pom-poms while performing at the FIFA World Cup games held at Gillette Stadium — “I never in a million years would have thought I would get to do that,” she says — and then traveled to Cancún, Mexico, for a photo shoot for the squad’s annual “Resort Cheer” calendar. In August, during the NFL preseason, she made her official game debut, and for the full season, September through January, Bucci will be performing at every home game (plus the Super Bowl, if the Patriots happen to advance).

In some ways, Bucci has prepared for this role for most of her life. Growing up in San Diego, she trained as a competitive dancer, studying contemporary dance, jazz, ballet, tap, hip-hop, and other styles. But she put that career on hold while at Columbia, where she majored in computer science and maintained a busy schedule of extracurricular activities, including serving as president of her sorority and participating in the Women’s Business Society. “I wanted to see what my life could look like without dance,” she says.

After graduating in 2025, Bucci suddenly had more free time, and she started to dip her toes back into the dance world, casually dropping in at studios around the city. A dance teacher in New York recommended that she try out for the Patriots cheerleading squad in Boston, a city where Bucci has family and friends. She ended up taking prep classes and auditioning for the team. Bucci was particularly attracted to the flexibility of the job. “What’s awesome about an NFL cheerleader role is that, while it’s a part-time position, we do everything outside of traditional work hours,”

she says.

Unlike competitive cheerleading, which involves gravity-defying stunts (watch the 2000 film *Bring It On* or the Netflix documentary series *Cheer*, and you'll see high school and college troupes performing daredevil throws and acrobatic tumbling tricks), cheerleading for the NFL is an entertainment spectacle. "It's more like spirited dance," explains Bucci, whose various routines call for switches among blue, red, and white uniforms — Patriot colors. "Our style draws influences from jazz, hip-hop, and commercial dance, and it requires a lot of technique. We're doing pirouettes, we're doing leaps, and sometimes there are tumbling tricks if a dancer has that skill set."

When the cheerleaders aren't stomping, shimmying, and performing intricate steps on the field in perfect unison at home games, they act as community ambassadors for the Patriots franchise, which is owned by businessman and philanthropist Robert K. Kraft '63CC (Robert K. Kraft Field at Columbia's Baker Athletics Complex is named after him). "We do appearances at elementary schools, and we go to career fairs," says Bucci. Like her, many squad members lead busy lives outside of cheerleading — everything from corporate jobs to teaching careers. "We do so much more than meets the eye. There are people on the team who are pursuing postgraduate degrees or studying for the LSATs."

Patriots cheerleaders must reaudition every year, and they can stay on the squad for four years at most. When Bucci eventually hangs up her pom-poms, she plans to stay in the tech world and maybe go into project management. "I'm really fortunate that I can pursue that and pursue this — there isn't a lot of conflict with my time and energy," she says. "Whatever's meant to happen will happen, but I'm going to keep putting my best foot forward with cheer, and balance both paths as best I can."

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