A bizarre, violent hazing caught on video shows girls gone far worse than wild

Long before she enrolled at Glenbrook North High School, Stephanie Spiwak dreamed of taking part in a teen tradition there: the annual powder-puff football game between junior and senior girls. Not sanctioned by school officials, powder puff had evolved into a party and initiation ceremony in which certain older girls doused younger girls with ketchup, mustard and raw eggs. "My sister did it and had the time of her life," says Spiwak. "I just wanted to have a good time."

Certainly, Spiwak will never forget what happened that day—but she'll remember for the wrong reasons. Ordered to kneel in a circle in a forest clearing a few miles from their school in Northbrook, Ill., a group of about 20 juniors were showered with paint, animal parts, vomit and even human feces by seniors while scores of male and female classmates looked on. Spiwak was rescued by friends, but others were not so lucky. Several girls were kicked, punched and choked with pig intestines; five ended up in a hospital with concussions, bruised ribs, a broken ankle and, in one case, a head gash requiring stitches. "When they ran out of stuff to pour on us, they smashed us with buckets," says Spiwak.

The sordid spectacle, replayed countless times by TV stations around the world, has caused a furor in the Chicago suburb and beyond. The following week administrators suspended 28 girls and 4 boys, all seniors, and recommended they be expelled. Meanwhile, police are considering filing criminal charges. They are also investigating reports that parents provided beer that helped fuel the incident. Says Kim Parks, 43, the mother of a sophomore: "I want to point my finger at the parents and ask, 'Where have you been? Who's been raising your child?'"

Stephanie Spiwak's mother, Marcy, while admitting she had heard powder puff had grown rowdy in recent years, insists she had no idea that events would turn violent. "I asked her, 'Why do you want to do this?'" says Marcy of her youngest daughter. For her part, Stephanie says she sensed she had made a mistake as soon as she arrived at the Chipilly Woods forest preserve, where the juniors had been told to show up around noon. "I closed my eyes as tight as I could and closed my mouth and they just started pouring stuff on us," says Stephanie. Soon, seniors were shoving innards in the juniors' faces. Onlookers, including boys, apparently jumped in to hold them down. "One of the spectators started yelling, 'You've got to stop, this has gotten out of hand,'" says junior Courtney Saltzman, who was also hazed, of what she later saw on videotape. "A senior went nuts at her, swearing and screaming, 'Get out of my face. It's none of your business.'"

Led away by senior friends and taken to a pal's house where she showered, Stephanie escaped the worst of the hazing. But other girls were reportedly targeted by seniors to settle scores over boys. According to students from the school, some of the seniors set out to avenge the unusually rough treatment they had received the year before. "These girls were in the mood for retaliating," says Kaitlin Getz, 18, Glenbrook North's senior-class president, who did not go to the park.

Experts in hazing say similar incidents have occurred at high schools all over the country though they usually involve boys and are rarely caught on video. At Glenbrook North, where many are still wondering how the actions of a relative few could have smeared the reputation of an entire school, the search for an explanation has even focused blame on the victims. But that, says Stephanie, is simply not fair. "People keep saying we signed up for this," she says, "but no one signed up to be brutally beaten."