

# *The* ★ WHEEL ★ *Deal*

**THIS AIN'T YOUR MAMA'S ROLLER DERBY**

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The Punks took on the Preps at the inaugural School-Yard Brawl, a bout that combined members of the Jacksonville RollerGirls and Gainesville Roller Rebels.

*Many people have the wrong impression of roller derby.*

Introduced to America in the 1930s as a form of "sports entertainment," roller derby consisted of male and female skaters doing laps around an oval track in a simulated cross-country race. Like dance marathons that were popular at the time, roller derby was all about endurance with two-person teams skating more than 11 hours per day.



## As skaters got faster

and more daring, they would occasionally collide. It didn't take sports promoter Leo Seltzer long to realize that these crashes were becoming the main attraction for audiences (just like stock car racing), so he expanded the teams to five skaters and changed the rules to encourage even more physical contact.

By the late 1960s, roller derby had morphed into a highly theatrical bruise-fest with flamboyant skaters like Ann "Banana Nose" Calvello acting like professional wrestlers, playing to the crowd and beating the bejeezus out of each other or at least pretending to. Events were televised nationally, and tens of thousands of fans would turn out to events at arenas like Madison Square Garden. But, by the mid-1970s, the proverbial wheels fell off.

Over the years, other promoters, TV producers and even the skaters themselves have attempted to revive the sport but with no lasting success. The most recent incarnation—an all-female, grassroots organization governed by the Women's Flat Track Roller Derby Association—looks to change all that by eradicating misconceptions about the sport, starting with the fact that it *is* a sport.

In addition to the element of fierce competition, roller derby involves physical exertion and considerable skill.

Like most "fresh meat," Andi Capps 'Em\* didn't realize exactly how much skill and effort would be required of her until she became a skate-carrying member of the Jacksonville RollerGirls during its inaugural season in 2006.

"I saw a demo at a charity event and thought it looked like a lot of fun," she says. "I thought it would be a good way to meet other girls, and it would be good exercise." These days, Andi compares the team's twice-weekly work-out sessions, which consist of a 60-lap warm-up, drills, calisthenics, running and scrimmages, to "football practice." Having played softball and competing on the boys' wrestling team in high school, she's not one afraid of breaking a sweat—or a bone, for that matter.

Even more important to the roller derby girls than fans knowing how hard they work is that fans realize that the drama they see at a bout is not staged. The trash-talking, the falls, the injuries, the fights: They're all real (just like ice hockey).

(From top): The pivot (in the striped helmet) blocks for the jammer (in the starred helmet) as she makes her way through the pack; Compton's Most Wanted and Booty Skool Dropout are calm before the storm; Anita H. and Booty Skool Dropout are doin' it for DUUUVAL!



Andi Capps 'Em, seen in the penalty box (top) and fighting with Deviant Behavior (bottom), says she might not be the best or fastest skater, but "I can knock people down."



## *"When people ask if roller derby is fake,*



I tell them, 'Come skate with us in our circle and you'll see how fake it is,'" says RollerGirl Anita H.\* (we'll stick with just the initial since this is a family publication). Or they could just watch Kat von Scratchereyesout\* hobble around the rink since she broke her ankle earlier this year at the Florida Roller Derby Championship.

Andi recalls a specific reality check two years ago when a near-riot broke out at a bout after a Tallahassee skater tackled Jacksonville's Booty Skool Dropout.\*

"Booty tried to get her off of her and kicked her in the head with her skate. Blue-Eyed Hellyn\* came over to help her. Then Tallahassee's coach grabs Blue-Eyed Hellyn by the neck, so her husband jumps over the wall and starts beating up the coach," she says. Since Tallahassee was ahead before the fighting ensued, the referees gave the team the win before banishing them from the building. "We were mad because we would have won. We were only two points behind and about to score with only four seconds left on the clock. But we let it go because we wanted to keep the peace."



\* In roller derby, it is a common practice to refer to teammates by their derby names even outside the rink, which is how they're referred to here. Matter of fact, Andi admits there are some girls on her team whose "real" names she doesn't know.



(Clockwise from above): They're all upright here, but skaters fell 42 times in the third period alone; Between 200 and 300 fans come out for the RollerGirls' home bouts; Interleague games feature a penalty wheel where opponents participate in wacky challenges like leg wrestling



## Many people also have

the wrong impression of roller derby skaters.

While it may be natural to feel threatened by a woman who favors tattoos and torn fishnet hose, giving the finger and engaging in full-contact sports, fans may be surprised to learn that outside the oval the Jacksonville RollerGirls are anything but intimidating.

When she's jamming for the RollerGirls, Compton's Most Wanted\* describes her skating personality as "very aggressive" and says "if there's ever any issue with another team, I'm one of the first ones over there" (which would explain why, she says, she fouled out of 80 percent of her high school basketball games). But when she's not competing, she maintains that she's "a very sweet person," not hard to believe considering her day job is teaching pre-school at a Methodist church.

Fortunately, she hasn't had to call on her roller derby experience in the classroom, but it has served her well in other areas of her life.

"I was going through a divorce when I got involved [with the RollerGirls], and it really helped me. I'm having an absolute blast, and it's been more fun than I imagined," Compton says. "It's the best thing that ever happened to me."

Andi, the girl who used to wrestle on the boys' team, also shows her sensitive side when explaining what the sport has meant to her. "I've met some of my best friends through roller derby. And not to sound corny, but it's like a sisterhood ... or a sorority," she says, quickly adding, "a punk rock sorority."

"Punk rock sorority" is a perfect way to explain the bout photographed one Sunday night in April. The School-Yard Brawl, as it was dubbed, pitted the Punks with each team composed of seven members of the RollerGirls and seven members of the Gainesville Roller Rebels, who were skating in their first real bout (hence, the commingling of teams).

"They're like our little sisters," Andi says of the Roller Rebels.

And, in true big sister fashion, they gave them tough love. \*J

*The Jacksonville RollerGirls have two "scheduled beatings" remaining this season, June 22 and October 5, at Mandarin Skate Station. For more information, visit [www.jacksonvillrollergirls.com](http://www.jacksonvillrollergirls.com).*

(From top): Unable to skate due to injury, Kat von Scratchereyesout takes on an alter-alter-ego, the Dean of Discipline; The Punks prevail 98-77.



## The Rules of Roller Derby in 99 Words

A bout is divided into a series of short races known as "jams." Assuming no penalties have been called, a jam starts with five members from each team on the track: three blockers and a pivot (in the striped helmet), who form the pack, and a jammer (in the starred helmet). Teams score points when their jammer passes members of the opposing team for the second time and every lap after. Jams last two minutes unless they are called off by the lead jammer (the first jammer to pass the opposing team). Each bout consists of three 20-minute periods.