



DEEPER INTO THE RULES



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Roller Derby is played by 2 teams of up to 5 skaters each. 4 players on each team are Blockers. The Blockers from both teams together form the Pack. The 5th skater on each team is the Jammer—they wear the star on their helmet and they score the points. One of the Blockers wears a stripe on their helmet—they're the Pivot. We'll talk more about the Pack and the Pivot's privileges later.

BASICS



The game is played in increments called jams. A jam can last up to 2 minutes, but usually ends sooner, when the Lead Jammer calls off the jam by tapping their hips. A single whistle starts the jam, and the series of 4 whistle blasts ends the jam. The teams get 30 seconds to line up between jams.

GRR plays by the Rules of Flat Track Roller Derby (rules.wftda.com) that are published by the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA).

BASICS






LEAD JAMMER

On their initial trip through the pack, the Jammers are competing to obtain Lead Jammer status. (A “trip” is basically a lap for the Jammers—each time they go through the pack is called a “trip”). The first Jammer to pass all the Blockers legally, upright, and in-bounds gets Lead Jammer status. The Jammer’s referee will signal Lead Jammer status with 2 whistles, and they will point at their Jammer as long as the Jammer has Lead.



LEAD JAMMER


The advantage of being Lead Jammer? The Lead Jammer is the only skater that can end the jam before the 2 minutes is up (by tapping their hips). They can control the clock. Since score differential is what matters, the Lead Jammer will often earn points and then call off the jam before the opposing Jammer (who is usually following close behind) can earn any points. Or, if the Lead Jammer's team is ahead in points, and the Jammers are trading points trip-for-trip, the Lead Jammer might let the jam keep going to burn time off the period clock.





LEAD JAMMER

Sometimes there is no Lead Jammer, and the jam goes for the full 2 minutes. If a Jammer removes their Star or gets a penalty during a jam, they can't earn and don't retain Lead Jammer status for the rest of the jam. So if Blue Jammer wins Lead Jammer, but then gets a penalty, there will be no Lead Jammer for the rest of the jam (Lead can only be awarded to one Jammer per jam). Sometimes both Jammers exit their initial trip without meeting the criteria (passing all blockers legally, upright, and in-bounds), so Lead Jammer isn't awarded at all.





SCORING

After their initial trip, Jammers are on scoring trips. Jammers (whether Lead or not) score 1 point per opposing Blocker that they lap and pass. The Jammer must have the star on their helmet, be upright and in-bounds, and pass the Blocker legally for the pass to count. So a Jammer can score up to 4 points per trip.

SCORING



Jammers don't always score all 4 points on a trip. Some examples of how this happens:

01

The Jammer falls and slides past an opposing Blocker. They don't get the point for that Blocker.

02

The Jammer passes an opposing Blocker without the star on their helmet.

03

The Jammer passes an opposing Blocker while out-of-bounds, but that Blocker is also out-of-bounds. The Jammer doesn't get the point, but they can continue without a Cut penalty because the Blocker is out-of-bounds too.

04

The jam ends before the Jammer has earned a pass on all opposing blockers.



SCORING

Points are signaled by the Jammer's referee after each trip, and they are tallied up at the score table and on the scoreboard. If a Jammer hasn't completed a scoring trip, they can keep trying to pass any Blockers whose points they didn't earn yet. After a Jammer completes a trip, they can no longer go back to earn any points that they missed from that trip.





PACKS

Why don't Blockers run away to avoid getting passed by the Jammer? Teams can't run away and turn the game into a race because the blockers are required to form a "pack". The pack is the largest group of skaters from both teams that are within 10 ft of each other measured along the length of the track. Blockers are penalized if they take a sudden action that destroys the pack like run away, suddenly stop, take a knee, or go out-of-bounds on purpose, and they get penalized if they don't immediately reform a pack that's been broken.

PACKS

You'll see the inside pack referees (the two in the middle of the track that aren't chasing the Jammers) raise both arms and warn, "No Pack" when there isn't a pack. That's the Blockers' cue to form a pack again so that normal play can continue.

If you watch carefully, you'll notice the Blockers try to control the pack speed, or even create a No Pack situation without being penalized (natural game play that results in a No Pack is not penalized) to create an advantage for themselves or their Jammer.



ENGAGEMENT ZONE



Blockers must stay within a zone that extends 20 ft in front of and behind the pack. This area is the engagement zone. So, Blockers on the track that are more than 10 ft from the pack—and therefore not themselves part of the pack—but are within 20 ft can also still block and be blocked.

An inside pack referee will raise one arm and warn “Out of Play” if Blockers are outside of the engagement zone. Those Blockers must stop blocking and return to the engagement zone to avoid a penalty.

You’ll see blockers from one team form a line along the length of the track and maintain a 10 ft spacing from each other. This is called “bridging,” and is a way to extend the engagement zone (by extending the pack itself), which gives them more room to block the opposing Jammer.




PENALTIES

Roller derby is a full contact sport. But, contact must be made using the hips, shoulders, and body. This isn't your parents' roller derby; you won't see pile drivers and clotheslines here.

PENALTIES


Some of the penalties you might see during the game are:

- Forearms—using forearms or hands to grab or shove an opponent, or using elbows to hit an opponent. It's ok to block with upper arms.
- Low Block—tripping an opponent.
- Back block—hitting an opponent in the center of their back.
- High block—contacting an opponent above the collarbone.
- Direction—blocking an opponent while stopped or moving clockwise on the track.
- Multiplayer—forming a link with a teammate to block an opponent.
- Cut—aka track cut...using the out of bounds area to gain position on other skaters.
- Other illegal contact—blocking skaters who are down, out of bounds, or out of play or blocking other skaters while down, out of bounds, out of play, or airborne.



A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THE CUT PENALTY...

If a skater goes out of bounds, they can't better their position relative to other skaters when they re-enter the track. In other words, if a skater is blocked out of bounds, they have to come back in bounds behind the skater that blocked them and behind anyone else that was on the track in front of them when they went out. The on-track skaters meanwhile are allowed to move around. So, you'll often see the on-track skaters go clockwise to force the out-of-bounds skater backward.





The Jammer can, at any time during the jam, transfer their role to the Pivot by completing a Star Pass. To do this, the Jammer physically hands the Star (helmet cover) to the Pivot. The Pivot becomes the Jammer, and the Jammer becomes a Blocker. The handoff must happen directly - they can't throw it or pass it through a different teammate. The Jammer and the Pivot are the only skaters that can legally possess the star.

STAR PASSES

A star pass is handy if the non-lead Jammer is stuck in the pack. Since the other team needs to protect against two Skaters from escaping during a potential Star Pass, it can help in getting a Jammer out of the pack. A freed Jammer creates scoring pressure that forces the Lead Jammer to call off the jam.



JOIN US!



If you've made it this far, maybe you have an interest in nerding out on this kind of thing. Consider joining the sport as a referee, non-skating official, or coach! We're always looking for more help, and so are our friends in surrounding leagues. Contact us at join@gainesvillerollerrebels.com for more information!

And if you want to go even deeper into the rules, check out the actual rules documents at rules.wftda.com.