

Sports

THE GAMES, THE PLAYERS, THE NUMBERS AND MORE • Pittsburgh Post-Gazette • SATURDAY, JUNE 9, 2007

LIVING ON THE EDGE

Participants in four-team local roller derby league relish physical play and being a little different

By Shelly Anderson
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

She is stuck at a desk in her day job. "I'm an industry-specific Web site slave, a Web-surfer chick," says the petite woman from the South Side with long, magenta-edged black hair who swears she's a lot older than you might think. Now, she has an escape for

evenings and weekends. She is co-founder of the Steel City Derby Demons, a four-team women's roller derby league in its first season.

She plays for the Bitch Doctors, who compete against the Hot Metal Hellions, the Slumber Party Slashers and the Wrecking Dolls.

She prefers you call her by her derby alter ego, Suzy Sydal.

If you're thinking this is not your typical fringe or minor-league sport,

then you're pretty sharp, Einstein.

"Pittsburgh is perfect for this," Sydal says. "It's a blue-collar town. We love our sports, and we like to see them get physical."

Is this league physical?

"Very," Sydal says.

For those old enough to remember roller derby in the days of Raquel Welch, this is an updated, slightly less "Kansas City Bomber" version of the sport.

But it does have an edge.

Uniforms include fishnet stockings and short skirts. Tattoos and dyed hair are optional but plentiful. Tickets to the monthly bouts at BladeRunners in Harmarville are available, among other places, at a body-piercing parlor.

Consider the goings-on Sunday night at the league's practice rink,

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Local roller derby players relish being different

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Romp N Roll in Glenshaw, an event that will be repeated this Sunday.

Ten women of various skill level showed up, ready to be tested. The only requirement was they be at least 21.

They came hoping to make it onto the league's taxi squad.

Otherwise known as the Fresh Meat Squad.

The best of the bunch at this tryout is Jennifer Remaley, 25, of Butler, who has two friends who play in the league. She wheeled around nearly flawlessly on her quad-style speed skates as several current players evaluated the newbies' skills.

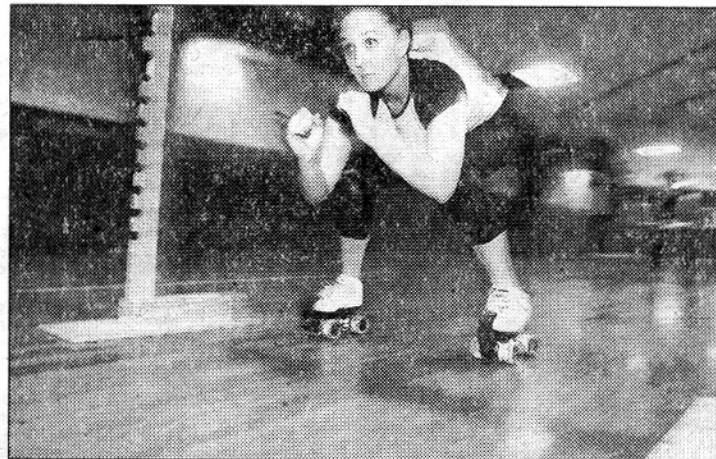
She doesn't mind the moniker. "That's just part of it," Remaley says. "If you're fresh meat, you're fresh meat."

Remaley is a natural. Her parents met while roller skating, and she has been on wheels all her life. Now she wants to graduate to being hell on wheels.

"I called my mom back home in the Poconos. The first thing she asked me was, 'What's your [roller derby] name?'" Remaley says. "So they remember what it's all about."

If she makes it — which seems likely — Remaley is hoping to transform into Generation X. Or maybe Jenneration X.

Another fresh meat wannabe



Annie O'Neill/Post-Gazette

Jennifer Remaley, of Butler, puts her skills on display at Romp N Roll Glenshaw at a tryout Sunday for the Steel City Derby Demons, a local roller derby league.

is Kristin Malik, 25, of Ross, who heard about the tryouts through word of mouth.

Blond with a lip ring and short jean cutoffs that showed a tattoo ringing one thigh, Malik looked the part, although her stopping and crossover skills were a little shaky. Still, she is hopeful.

"I like competitive sports, although co-ed soccer was as close as I got to this," she says.

Roller derby is a sport that comes with a different attitude.

Goth and grit meet timing and technique.

At league and team practices, drills emphasize various skills and moves — balanced hip-checking, body positioning, passing strategy — for the sport, in which a jammer and four blockers per team navigate a flat, tight oval. A jammer pass equals a point, and points climb into the hundreds over three, 20-minute periods.

Sydal, who helped to conceive the player-driven league in January 2006 and oversaw a year of practices before initiating games, calls it a DIY(do it yourself) operation.

There is no management per se. Players are responsible for everything from organizing fundraisers and community-aiding events to writing press releases to leading conditioning sessions.

Alvilda Kil, for instance, is the paperwork queen for the tryouts.

Blissy Sadistic, 28, is one of the few roller derby veterans and has helped to run practices. She moved from New York, where she played for the Gotham Girls league as she pursued an acting career.

"I'm avant-garde, a punk rocker," Sadistic says.

You would think that in New York, where anything goes, roller derby would be a hit. Instead, it's still underground.

"They thought we were these weirdo girls," Sadistic says. "But, in Pittsburgh, they seem to understand."

And so do the players.

"Every girl likes to dress up," Sadistic says.

The season runs through September, followed by a travel team that competes against teams from the 37 other leagues in the Women's Flat Track Derby Association.

The local league's next bout is June 16, the Summer Slam. Get the gory details at www.steelcityderbydemons.com.

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