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Roller Derby league debuts

By Francine Garrone
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Friday, January 26, 2007

Sit back, relax and prepare for thrills and spills delivered by wild women on wheels.

The ladies, members of the Steel City Derby Demons roller derby league, hope to pack a wallop for fans when they open their first season with a sold out exhibition Saturday at BladeRunners in Harmarville.

"This is an empowering sport for women," said Dana Valente, skate name Dresta Kill, and captain of the Bitch Doctors team. "The women don't fall into the typical athletic build. We are all body types, races and ages - it is a sport for everyone."

In the first year of competition teams compete in intraleague. Once the season is over, bouts are allowed with teams in other leagues, said Valente, of Parks.

Steel City began its crusade to find skaters last

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January. One month later the girls were practicing.

There are four teams in the league, which is governed by the

The Next Bout

Who: Steel City Derby Demons

What: Exhibition season opener (sold out)

When: Saturday, Jan. 27

Where: BladeRunners Ice Complex, 66 Alpha Drive West, Harmarville.

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Women's Flat Track Derby Association. They include the Bitch Doctors, Hot Metal Hellions, Wrecking Dolls and Slumber Party Slashers.

There are 48 girls on the four teams and 16 on the beginners' squad, called Fresh Meat.

Eight of the girls live in the Valley - four of whom joined about three weeks ago.

"Fresh Meat is equivalent to the practice squad," said Valente. "They need to finish and pass the skills of roller derby before they can become part of a team."

Passing the skills test is essential and helps participants avoid penalties for illegal blocks.

According to Kara Wendekier, skate name Double Destroyer, and co-captain of Bitch Doctors, illegal blocks include elbowing, tripping, choking, close-lining, punching or kicking.

"Legal blocks would be booty blocking and shoulder and body checks," she said. "This is a very aggressive sport. Nothing is scripted like in the '70s."

And aggressive it is.

Behind the helmets, elbow and knee pads and mouth guards hides no fear - at least for most of the skaters.

Valente has yet to be cleared to return to the rink after suffering a separated shoulder.

Other have experienced a broken ankle and fingers, bumps and bruises and a lost tooth.

"Sometimes the pads make a person feel invincible," Valente said.

Derby Demons is not just about the hard hits. The league and players also strive to give back to the community.

For example, the girls collected over 100 cell phones, chargers and accessories and books for a local women's shelter.

"Giving back to the community does not stop there," Valente said. "We are collecting donations for a local no-kill animal shelter and hope to make a large donation."

Francine Garrone can be reached at fgarrone@tribweb.com.

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Steelers hire Tomlin

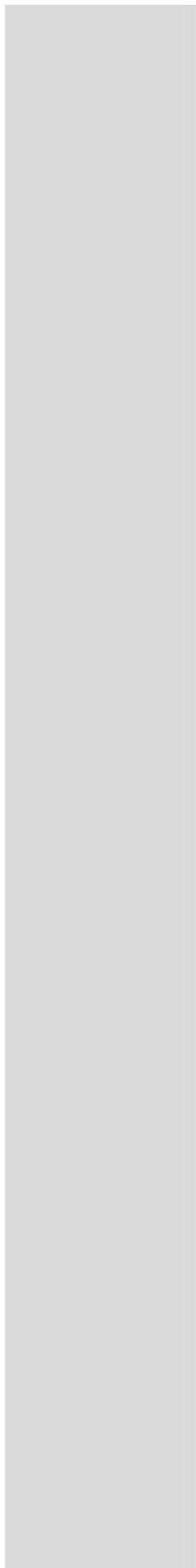
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