



## WOMEN'S ROLLER DERBY GETS RESURRECTED

By Alyssa Rashbaum  
Photos by Kathryn Deem

It's 9:30pm in Newark, NJ and a group of menacing women in mini skirts is standing at anxious attention, ready to fight. The rips in their fishnets reveal elaborate tattoos and yellowing bruises from past brawls. A whistle cuts the tension and the women take off, bumping and checking one another, slamming opponents to the ground.

**This is no street brawl – this is roller derby**, the rough-and-tumble sport of girl-on-girl action, the pastime that gives women free reign to beat the crap out of one another in the name of entertainment. And the league getting ready to brawl is one of the newest additions to the sport, the Garden State Roller Girls.

"I love the fact that there are so many different 'characters' involved in the game," said GSRG founder SLEZ-pass. "Girls that you would never think would be into something like this are. Each person brings something unique to the team and the league."

They are real estate brokers, internet employees, non-profit workers, doctors' assistants and students by day, and vicious terrors on wheels by night, ditching their family names in favor of monikers like SLEZ-pass, Kosher Kaos, Layla Smackdown, Smack & Deck-her, Belle N Somebashin', Moose, Jenna Von Fury, Lady Vengeance, and Thunder Kat.

"I love skating fast, and hitting into people while doing so,"

said Smackdown, co-captain of the league's Jersey City Bridge & Pummel team. "It's also fun to dress flirty, because that's a fun element to the sport, too. You flirt with violence, but don't strive for it. It's tough and precious at the same time."

The league got its start in February '06 when a group of like-minded girls found each other on the US RollerGirls site and Craig's List. Armed with virtually no skating experience and only a cursory knowledge of roller derby, the league got organized and has since become a major presence in the derby world, regularly recruiting "fresh meat" and practicing three times a week in anticipation for an April 2007 start to their inaugural season.

Like the GSRG, aspiring derby girls across the country are moving to reclaim the game, which was started in the 1930s during the Great Depression by a man named Leo Seltzer. In its first incarnation, roller derby was a very, very lengthy race,

in which participants skated thousands of circles around a track to complete the distance between New York and L.A. over the course of about 11 hours. Naturally, it wasn't all that much of an edge-of-your-seat sport. In fact, pretty much the only exciting part was when participants accidentally crashed into one another. So Seltzer capitalized on the carnage and changed the game to a team sport.

Derby came in and out of popularity through the next few decades, experiencing a heyday in the 1970s and 80s. In recent years the sport has come back with a vengeance. The newest incarnation is all-female, instead of co-ed, and leagues have been established in virtually every state, with the GSRG in Jersey, Gotham Girls and the Long Island Roller Rebels in New York, the Philly Roller Girls in Pennsylvania, the Sin City Roller Girls in Nevada, and countless others.

And while most of these players will tell you they don't generally play nice with other women, almost all of them site the female camaraderie as one of the best aspects of the sport.

"There's so much animosity between girls as it is," said Trixie Timebomb of the Long Island Roller Rebels' Ladies of Laceration team, "so its a good way to actually bond with other women and find there are similar interests and there are other girls like you out there."

"I really love the fact that all these girls with a non athletic history can come together and create a sport," echoed Timebomb's league leader, Captain Morgan.

Far from being just a part-time sport, most derby girls will tell you that the game has extended well into their regular lives. "I check people on a daily basis," said SLEZ-pass. "It just is something that comes natural to me. Watch out tourists in Times Square!"

"I've been challenging people on the sidewalks for years," said Smackdown. "Now I'll run my mouth off more and I'm definitely more likely to carry through on it. Who knew fishnets would make my testosterone increase?"

The GSRG season starts in April 2007. Check [www.gardenstaterollergirls.com](http://www.gardenstaterollergirls.com) for information on when and where to watch the girls in action.

The Long Island Roller Rebels can be found at [www.longislandrollerrebels.com](http://www.longislandrollerrebels.com)

### HOW TO START A DERBY LEAGUE

So you want to start a derby league? Think it's easy? Since its incarnation in February 2006, the GSRG alone has lost a group of girls who seemed more interested in the glory of the sport than the sport itself, and lost another team that practiced on the other side of the state.

Here's some advice from the top on how to make it work.

#### Layla Smackdown:

"Really question why you're doing it. If you're doing it for the 'glory' of saying you did it, good luck to you. It's more hard work than people could even imagine. Don't be afraid to ask for help."

#### Captain Morgan:

"Be Patient! Recruit, recruit, recruit! The more skaters you have the easier it will be to organize, promote and overall run the league. Have as many board meetings, at first, as practices! Do not start bouts until you are over prepared!"

#### SLEZ-pass:

"Have patience!! Don't be scared to talk to total strangers 'cause no one knows about your league 'til you get yourself out there. You have to set up a time frame and set goals for the league. You can't start a good league in like six months. It takes patience and time. And skate your ass off as much as possible!"

#### THE RULES

To the uninitiated, roller derby features a group of women in short dresses skating in circles and throwing each other to the ground with abandon. That's part of it, but it's actually much more technical.

In a bout, two teams of five skaters each take each other on for two-minute "jams." Each team has a pivot (the pacesetter), three blockers, and a jammer on the rink at one time. The jammers, who wear stars on their helmets to differentiate them from the pack of pivots (whose helmets feature a racing stripe) and blockers, start twenty feet behind the pack. When the first whistle blows, the pack takes off. At the second whistle, the jammers begin to fight their way through while blockers bump and check them to keep them from passing. The first girl to successfully break from the pack is the "lead jammer." After they lap the pack once, the jammers can attempt to score points by passing members of the opposing team. Each jam lasts two minutes but the lead jammer may call it off at any time to keep the other jammer from scoring.

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