

Sexy, smart women battle it out on skates in roller derby revival



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US roller derby, the televised 1970s mock-sport featuring skaters bashing each other while circling a rink, has gotten a cheeky make-over, complete with miniskirts, fishnet stockings and real competition.

Cheers shook the rafters of a hockey arena near San Francisco recently as tattooed, pierced and punk "roller chicks" did battle on skates in the All-Girl Flat-Track Season Kick-Off Bout on Saturday.

The teams jostled and bumped each other as they spun around the oval. One member of each team was a "jammer", whose mission it was to burst free, lap the pack, then score points by skating past opposing players.

Less than two years old, the Bay Area Derby -- BAD -- league opened its season with a game pitting the San Francisco Shevil Dead against their only rival, the Oakland Outlaws.

With players sporting noms de guerre such as Sassy Slayher, Lemmy Chokeya, Surly Vixen, Skatomasochist, and Faster Pussycat, the BAD girls are part of a sassy nation-wide roller derby revival.

"This is fantastic," remarked spectator Harold Caldwell, who was called "Ice Man" when he skated roller derby with legendary teams such as the Bay Area Bombers some 30 years ago.

"It's great to see roller derby go on. It's been dead so long."

BAD skaters stressed that they are a bruising, genuine new generation of a sport created as money-making entertainment shortly after the 1930s Great Depression.

While televised male and female matches in the 1970s had staged theatrics and rigged outcomes, today's leagues are all-girl, all-out, and all-real, boasted Racy Lane of the Shevil Dead.

"This lets us unleash alter egos, and use all of our femininity without being treated like strippers," said Dead co-captain Kitt Turbo, whose off-rink persona is stay-at-home mom Bradee Evans.

"This sport combines exhibitionism with athleticism."

Those traits have caught on with an audience, evidently -- all 1,000 tickets for the season opener in Oakland's Dry Ice Inline Hockey Arena sold out.

One fan held a sign with a marriage proposal for Lane, the alter-ego of 29-year-old Janine Pohorski.

Another sported a t-shirt with the message "Iva crush on Iva Vendetta," a Dead jammer. Vendetta skated over as he captured their meeting with a digital video camera.

Moments later, she rolled defiantly past the Outlaws and raised her yellow skirt to reveal a saucy epithet stitched in white on the seat of her black panties.

"We can all be tough, aggressive, strong and passionate, and then hang-out afterwards," said Lane, who has a master degree in family therapy. "I work all day with at-risk youth and come here at night. It's excellent therapy."

"There are a lot of women here with bachelor and master degrees; independent women who own businesses."

Women must be at least 21 years old to join the league, and medical coverage is recommended but not mandated.

A bus load of family and friends made the 111-mile (179-kilometer) trip from the city of Monterrey to cheer for Outlaw skater Roxie the Riveter, the alias for 27-year-old speech therapist Brittany Struve.

"I just hold my breath and hope none of them get hurt, not just my daughter," Roxie's mother, Toshia Struve, said while warily eying action on the track.

She sent her daughter four athletic mouth guards after another player got two front teeth knocked out.

Nearby, Lyndan Ubana screamed "You go girl!" to Nancy Drew Blood, a clothing designer who took to the rink wearing a gray blazer over her red Outlaw team shirt and fashionably tattered red-and-black skirt.

Red pompoms decorated the toes of Blood's black skates, and her logo was the silhouette of a woman on skates studying spilled blood with a magnifying glass.

"She's so fab, she's fierce," Ubana, 34, effused. "She lives and breathes roller derby."

As a DJ played edgy rock-and-roll music, elbows, skirts and skates flew around the rink. Players hurled their bodies into each other. Women were sent sprawling. By the end of the first period, there was blood on the surface.

At half-time, aspiring BAD girls referred to as "rinky dinks" jostled on skates with padded poles.

The Outlaws won the game, but both teams nursed sores from skidding on the hard track. "For the record, rink rash sucks," Vendetta, the alias of 23-year-old Andrea Bozeman, wrote on the league website. "And, fishnets do not protect. I still can't actually apply pants."

The teams will travel to Arizona in February to compete in nation-wide games expected to draw skaters from leagues in New York, Chicago, Seattle and other major US cities.

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