

## Fox Cityz Foxes: Meet the Derby Dames



*Give us any chance, we'll take it.  
Give us any rule, we'll break it.  
We're gonna make our dreams come true,  
Doin' it our way.*

*Laverne & Shirley theme*  
Norman Gimbel and Charles Fox

Three times a week Laverne gets laid at Player's Choice.

Luckily (sadly?), this isn't the story of a popular smart-mouthed trollop in a monogrammed sweater and her exotic adventures at a club frequented by platform-heeled pimps. Player's Choice is a brightly lit, family-friendly sports complex and Laverne is the affectionate nickname bestowed upon the roller derby floor dutifully assembled by team members of the Fox Cityz Foxz.

Steely-eyed and thin as a whippet, Wring Leader stalks the flat track assessing jammers for optimum speed and cat-calling blockers to brandish eviscerating elbows. Shoulder to shoulder in tightly packed circles, the derby dames level blows, fall like dominos, and brush themselves off for the next round.

Looking like pin-up girls hijacked by a biker gang, mothers, office workers, housewives, artists and conservative professionals hike striped parochial school socks over torn

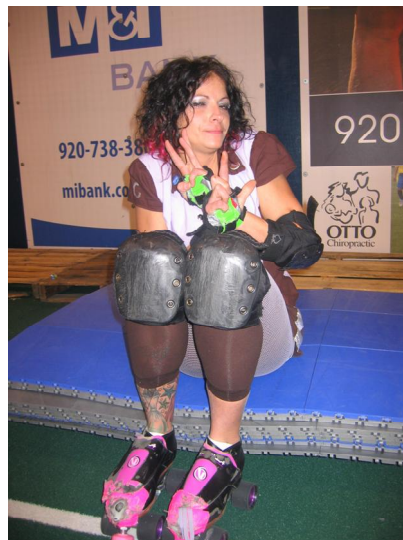
stockings, sport skull-n-crossbones attire, and strut in “Skinz” (high-cut Lycra shorts facilitating skating and fascinating the fan base). Subtle scars and peek-a-boo bruises are the ultimate accessories.

The thrice weekly two hour practice starts with a regiment reminiscent of boot camp. Skate, stop, and drop drills warm the women up for a series of scrimmages between four factions of the team: Pushy Posse, Rollergirl Regiment, Paper Dolls, and Eightqueen Wheelers.

A pack is formed by three blockers and a single pivot. The swift jammer circles the floor to earn points. Violence ensues.

The 1922 classic flat track races evolved into Leo Seltzer’s peaceful 1935 Transcontinental Roller Derby in Chicago. The relatively tame sport gained popularity and by 1937, rugged American ingenuity had added a flash of danger for bigger box office success. Shoving and pushing became part of the game, but the traditional derby theater emerged in the 1960s and early 70s. If anyone tired of brutality, the sexual revolution infused the sport with tight shorts and clinging tops to entice a television audience. Fantasy cat-fights and hot broad brawls abounded. The strength of women’s rights advocacy may have challenged the validity of sexpots on skates, but years after derby’s last gasp, a riot-feminist revival was jump-started in 2001 by an Austin, TX league immortalized in the documentary *Hell on Wheels*. This time all body sizes, ethnicities, styles, and ages were represented. Suddenly, skating was punk and women were reclaiming the rink.

The Northeastern Wisconsin brand of roller derby is comprised of women from Green Bay, Appleton, Neenah, Menasha, Oshkosh and all the little surrounding towns. There is a hardiness to women who dig cars out of snow banks in subzero temperature to make practice. Each skater has a gritty handle and performing persona often incongruous with her workaday life but highly indicative of a suppressed alter-ego. Operating in the outer rink as Delonna Kaufman, Wring Leader is the founder of the Fox Cityz Foxz.



“Laverne is my hero,” she says channeling the flat-toned, eye-rolling, no BS attitude of her idol.

Penny Marshall’s iconic character was a tough-talking realist often at odds with her silly sock hop setting. Wring Leader’s ankle-to-knee tattoo is a celebration of archetypical fifties feminism with a touch of Laverne Defazio-style irreverence: a string of pearls, lipstick, stiletto pump, cocktail dress, and a baby blue satin bow atop a skull.

Kaufman’s inspiration for creating a local league came as the single mom skated around a lake contemplating what life would hold in store as her 18 year old was preparing to move on. “What am I going to do for *myself* now? What am I going to do for fun?” Where empty nest syndrome finds some women scrap booking, it sends others scrapping. Her resolution would eventually be inked across her skin: “Derby or Die”.

Realizing there must be other women feeling lost and needing a stress-relieving outlet, she put up her own money to create fliers, make t-shirts, and develop a skater owned/skater operated limited liability corporation. What started as a two-girl team in 2007 grew to a 60 woman army by 2008.

The Foxz take everyone. Skaters only need be female, 21 and over, insured, and possessing buckets of motivation. Wring Leader’s black tousled hair tipped with pink and metallic eyeliner matching silver hotpants may seem initially intimidating, but her entire philosophy is one of inclusion and community: “You come, you’re in!” There are no tryouts, no junior high team-picking terrors, and no cliques.

Journalist Rachel Rausch had never laced a pair of skates prior to her first derby practice. Mesmerized by an expo match, she tottered onto the flat track as her newly minted character Rosie the Rumbler and got a crash course in roller derby: a concussion. Out cold, riding in the ambulance, her clothes appeared foreign to her. “I didn’t know who I was.”



Still possessed by an initial enthusiasm for the sport (“I wanna do that!”), and bolstered by the support of fellow Foxz, Rausch dedicated three months of determined practice before passing her minimum skills test. She had never played competitive sports in her life, but felt compelled to teach her children not to give up in the face of adversity. Her world became “full time work, full time mom, full time derby.”

When Rosie the Rumbler isn’t nudging and shoving the skate pack, she acts as the corporation’s media liaison. Her blood red lips and artfully applied faux black eye are softened by a broad smile, gregarious personality, and organizational ability in handling press. The Foxz encourage members to highlight their off-track talents in support of the team.

“I learned to skate at age 35,” she said, “and I haven’t had this much fun since I was a teenager.”

39 year old Beth Hinds initially considered her foray into roller derby a midlife crisis. As a bank branch manager, mother of sons aged 7 and 9, and wife of a youth minister, developing her Anya B. Hinds image was a step outside of her carefully crafted existence.



Still, the former 80s skater girl felt compelled to respond to the roller derby ad and today she proudly sports a pivot pin as a release from her more conservative, straight-laced life. One of the best aspects of following her passion was the support of coworkers, pastors, teachers, and family (her sons are proud of mom kicking butt in fishnets!) Everyone in her circle is looking forward to the first bout.

When Beth Hinds removes her office-appropriate spectacles, Anya B. Hinds frames her striking green eyes in cobalt blue glasses festooned with stars. It’s a double life. She has a pair for battling paperwork, and another for battling Paper Dolls.

Insurance account manager Shelly Schalow bears the formidable title Secretary of Skate. Dressed in camouflaged t-shirt, she approaches her training with a militaristic focus. Two practices are required, but she attends all three. On the track, she is alert and

watchful. Her moniker is permanently sketched on her arm above a pair of pink and green skates.



Encouraged by friends to join, she thought it would be a good way to remain busy and keep up the physical activity she was used to from swimming and dance. What she discovered was an instant community of close friends and strong support network. The Secretary is even scheduling her wedding around skate season so all the derby troops can attend.

Another aspect keeping her committed to the Fox Cityz Foxz is their charitable outreach. In addition to seasonal activities, such as ringing the Salvation Army bell and gift-wrapping on behalf of Habitat for Humanity, the team has raised over \$10,000 for the Oshkosh Area Humane Society, Special Olympics, and the Christine Ann Center domestic abuse shelter. It is not without its symbolism that these ladies exercise healthy aggression in a controlled environment while supporting women who are violently battered in dangerous situations. There a subliminal message reading, “Get out, derby up, and shove back!”

“This whole experience has taught me to love and respect women again,” says Derrieress (aka Sara Curran).



With her pigtails, dusky tan, and brilliant blue eyes, Curran resembles a former cheerleader, but this personal trainer gravitated towards solitary sports like weight-lifting and considered herself one of the boys growing up. Initially concerned by cattiness, she was still compelled towards the contact sport.

“I wanted to play football in high school but I was too small and a girl.”

Piqued by a news story and her own online investigation ([www.foxcityzfoxz.com](http://www.foxcityzfoxz.com)), she joined the team and brought her 14 year old son to hang out trackside with the rest of the “Rink Rats”. The unexpected outcome of her experience was a sort of feminist awakening, “It’s like being born a girl again.”

Stay-at-home mom Nikki Bellin, transformed by devil-horned helmet into Slick Nikki, is wearing a Frosty the Snowman t-shirt that her preschool son could appreciate, but her skating sisters understand as a subversive call to pack members, “Catch me if you can!”



Bellin asserts that the “derby widowers” have a lot to do with the Fox’z success.

“He puts my happiness first,” she says of her husband, an engineer with a twisted sense of humor. He stays home with the kids while she attends practices and meets.

Slick Nikki initially joined the team with another mother when their infants were 8 weeks old. It was a way to drop some baby weight and get out of the new mom ghetto so often imposed on women of young children. Not only is it an excellent workout, but she is reprising former merchandising skills in dealing with derby paraphernalia, which fulfills needs beyond housework and childcare.

When her son asks, “Why do you go to derby?” she gently assures, “Because hitting other women makes me a better mommy.”



Cassandra Gagnon programs robots and punches numbers all day. One can only imagine the office exterior of this tough blue-eyed blond master data administrator who sits on the sidelines in green tiger-striped Skinz, pink sparkle nail polish, a “Rollergirl Regiment” shirt, and helmet proclaiming “My other ride is your mom.” In her Roxxy Rage attire, she has probably punched more opponents than numbers.

“I always loved roller derby and watched it with my dad.”

Quick to differentiate the Foxz brand of sportsmanship from the T&A televised matches of the 70s, she can’t quite sell out vintage derby with its feathered hair pulling, staged professional wrestling antics, and vibrant girl-on-girl gore.

Gagnon has a series of meaningful words tattooed across her forearm: freedom, diversity, destiny, experience, transcendence. Perhaps these reminders spurred her into accepting the skate challenge. She understands a lot of women may be intimidated by the sport because they are concerned about their skating abilities or fear injury, but contends, “It’s worth every bruise.”

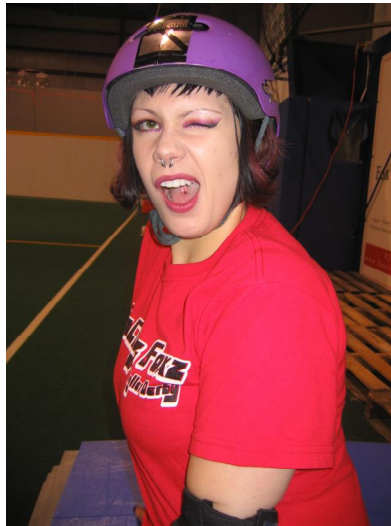


Roxy Rage's friend, Tinker Belt-ya, joined up after a little peer encouragement. Bubbling with girl-next-door appeal, she is adorned by several small piercings and a tiny tattoo of a skating bumblebee. Tinker Belt-ya is one of the few confessed jocks on the team. Back when she was Kerri Hergert, she participated in soccer, softball, gymnastics, baton, and basketball. Still, her athletic prowess didn't secure her against a broken tailbone.

"I couldn't sit for two weeks."

In the same way women who felt like high school misfits are able to break out of their shells, former sports stars can regain a sense of camaraderie and competitive edge. By day she works as a customer service representative, but by night she helps coach the other women and enjoys having them look to her for guidance.

"In my job I'm the one taking the orders. In derby, I'm the one giving the orders."



Some of the Fox Cityz Foxz come to the sport as an extension of the life they are already living. Laura Reed, designer of the team logo, is called Sects N. Violets, a persona similar to her everyday look. A pink and black Jolly Roger get-up matches her pink and black streaked hair which is protected by mudflap mama headgear. She already had the clothes, tattoos of pinups, and subculture associations, but reveled in finding a place where she could just be herself. What she was surprised to discover were the ways roller derby values extended into the professional arena.

Formerly uncompetitive without much of an aggressive streak, Reed's skating has helped her insurance sales job by promoting ambition and infusing her with an "I can do anything" spirit.

Other team members prefer an air of anonymity, as is the case with photographer Evil Kimevil. The married mother of three can't make all the extracurricular activities, but joined purely for the love of the skate.

“I wanted to do something crazy for myself,” she says, beaming a bright white smile and wrinkling her nose sweetly minutes before rolling back on the track to resume kicking ass.

On January 10<sup>th</sup>, the Fox Cityz Foxz will do something crazy for diehard derby fans of Northeastern Wisconsin as they deck out in full regalia and host a furious-paced bout at Player’s Choice in Appleton. Tickets are available on line or through the venue and all ages are welcome. WARNING: Those with heart conditions, individuals on life-support, and the terminally wimpy should stay fifteen feet away from the rink. Roller derby may accelerate voice changes in young men.

Informed spectators will appreciate strategic subtleties of the match while a new audience learns to love it. All one needs to understand is that two teams of five women are on the flat track during a two minute jam where the object of the game is for a jammer to break through the throng, skate like hell, lap the pack, and score. Think of it as a metaphorical dramatization of conception and the origin of life. No? Perhaps a social theorist would view the sport as symbolic of pushing against establishment barriers in order to achieve ultimate freedom, shattering the glass ceiling so women can ascend the corporate ladder, or even challenging pack mentality to sprint towards spiritual transcendence. Not buying it? What about really, really hot chicks in really, really short shorts smashing into each other really, really hard?

*Nothin’s gonna turn us back now.  
Straight ahead and on the track now.  
We’re gonna make our dreams come true,  
Doin’ it our way.*

*Laverne and Shirley theme*  
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