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SPORTS | WATERBURY

Want to Be a RollerGirl? Prepare for Hard Landings

By CYNTHIA WOLFE BOYNTON

WATERBURY

EVEN though an ice storm was in the forecast one recent day, women in colored tights and short-shorts drove as far as 50 miles to try out for the CT RollerGirls — the state's first and only roller derby league.

For some at the tryouts, like Katy Prince, 27, of Hartford, following the circular track, and learning basic blocks and falls, was as easy on skates as in sneakers.

Others, however, spent more time "whoa-oooh"-ing and wobbling near the rink's edge at Roller Magic, where teams in the league practice three times a week.

"It's been over a year since I've been on skates, and it shows," said Aviva Schleider, 28, of Danbury. "But all I can do is keep trying, right?"

That's the kind of attitude the CT RollerGirls look for.

Few women come to the league with Ms. Prince's confidence or expertise: roller speed skating is part of her exercise routine.

Most of the participants are 20- to 40-year-olds from [Connecticut](#) and southern Massachusetts who skated in high school and decided roller derby would be a great way to stay fit, be part of a team and — most important — have fun, said Jen Moulton, 36, of East Hampton, Mass., who has been with the league since its start in March 2006. The monthly bouts have attracted as many as 500 fans.

Many remember when roller derby was little more than a form of entertainment featuring exaggerated falls, loud name-calling and, in some cases, track-side alligator pits. So for skaters and fans alike, the realization that roller derby today is a legitimate sport requiring athleticism and specific skills is often an unexpected, but happy, surprise.

The physicality and roughness of the sport can also cause some real worry for family members.

At the tryout, Katie Brunetti, of Newtown was directing moves. But in competitions, she makes them. As the RollerGirls' leading scorer, Ms. Brunetti, a petite 27-year-old, tries to avoid the elbows and shoulders thrown her way as she worms through opponents intent on blocking her path.

“It’s worse than football — oooh, no!” Joanne Brunetti, 53, shouted as she watched her daughter trip and slide into fans at a match last month at the Connecticut Sports Center in Woodbridge. “It can get pretty rough, but it’s a lot of fun. Though I admit it’s the last thing I ever thought my daughter would do.”

Kelly Murphy of Hebron was similarly surprised to find herself at the tryouts. Creating a “secret life” as a CT RollerGirl isn’t something most people would expect a middle school teacher to do, Ms. Murphy said. But everyone needs some outlet to “let loose,” she added.

“I’m 28, my students think I’m old, and my days are so structured,” Ms. Murphy said. “This is something so different, so chaotic.”

RollerGirls standing rink-side praised her as “a natural.”

“I guess the years I spent in-line skating have paid off,” Ms. Murphy laughed. “But I’ll wait for the official phone call that says I make the team before I get excited.”

For the seven women who tried out, that call came the next night. One was accepted on a trial basis, while six were drafted onto three of the league’s teams: the Elm City Bone Crushers, the Iron Angels and the WidowMakers.

Part of the acceptance process is choosing a player name as campy and sardonic as the teams’ — a tradition carried over from roller derby’s earlier days, said Kristen Davis of Branford, who’s known in the rink as Milla Lowlife. Teammates include Lemmy Atter, Revengalina, Ether Bunny and C. Mya Rage.

Those who excel can try out for the CT RollerGirls’ national travel team, the Stepford Sabotage. Within the national Women’s Flat Track Derby Association, the Sabotage are ranked 28th out of 46 teams — not bad for representatives of a relatively new league, Ms. Davis said.

“For all of us, it’s a big commitment,” she said. “In addition to practices and bouts, every team member is responsible for helping run the league, raise funds and organize events.”

A CT RollerGirls match between the Iron Angels and Widowmakers was scheduled for Jan. 17 at 7 p.m. at the Connecticut Sports Center. Another match is planned Feb. 21 at 7 p.m. at the center.

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