

## Glass City Rollers competewith speed, power



FAR LEFT: Glass City Rollers celebrate as they defeat the Chemical Valley Rollergirls.

LEFT: Melissa Simon ('Wendy Boughbreaks') talks to the Glass City Rollers during halftime after they jumped out to a big lead against the Chemical Valley Rollergirls.

# On the Fast Track

By MIKE PEARSON  
BLADE FEATURES EDITOR

It's all about ankles and elbows and momentum — bodies racing around a circular track, arms locked, angles of attack.

It's all about the need for speed.

Welcome to a night with the Glass City Rollers, a female roller derby team that finds excitement in a sport designed as much for spectators as for those who participate.

On a recent Saturday night the Toledo team bested the Chemical Valley Rollergirls from Charleston, W. Va., at the International Boxing Club in Oregon before a sizable crowd that combined the bone-deep passion of soccer fans with the hysterical cheering and jeering of pro wrestling fanatics.

A member of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, the Glass City Rollers were founded in 2007 with a simple mantra: "By the skater, for the skater; in Toledo, for Toledo."

Like all sports, those who participate relish the physical challenge.

"It keeps me active and involved," said Maggie Bernath, president of the Glass City Rollers. "I am constantly tested and put out of my comfort zone, but that feeling when you've figured out a new strategy or mastered a new skill is unbeatable. It's part of being something different, nontraditional."

Far from being geared toward only young women, Ms. Bernath said many of the skaters on the Toledo squad are older. "The average age is in their 30s, but with junior roller derby taking off, that may change soon."

The skaters boast nicknames that hint at their fierceness: Looks That Kill, Elle O'Hell, ReoCurran Nightmare, Mother Nature, and Bobcat Molly. They wear helmets and elbow and knee pads. But mostly they wear a look of determination that says "If you didn't come to play, get out of the way."

For some, like Ms. Bernath, the sport can also be therapeutic.

"I started roller derby about a year after I lost my sister," she said. "It was a way for me to deal with the pain and anger, but in a healthy way. No one knew my story or gave me pity. I was just there to work hard and try out for the team. It became my therapy."

Of course, sometimes the therapy that's required is physical in nature.

"With any contact support there is always room for injury. We tend to get the normal bumps and bruises, but for serious injuries, I'd have to say torn meniscus, MCLs, and ACLs for our league."

Although roller derby is built around the pack mentality, there are specific roles. There are five players on each team: one jammer — the point scorer — three blockers playing defense, and one pivot, who plays defense but is in the leadership position in the pack, calling the shots.

There are rules, of course. Packs of skaters generally move clockwise, and simply stopping is a major infraction. And there are referees on hand to make sure skaters stay within the confines of an oval track that is 108 feet long and 75 feet wide, and wear the proper equipment.

"Most challenging for me is managing family time and derby time," Ms. Bernath said. "I'm married with two boys who are also involved in sports, so finding that balance can be difficult. Thankfully, I have a supportive husband. Most enjoyable would be the hard hits. There's something about learning how to take a hit and being able to give it back that I can't even put into words."

The Glass City Rollers will next meet the Black Heart Maidens of Hastings, Mich., at the International Boxing Club on March 14. Doors open at 5 p.m., with the bout starting at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$11, with children 10 and under admitted free. Information: [www.brownpapertickets.com/event/1065404](http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/1065404)

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Glass City Rollers jammer Dawn Kuhl ('Mother Nature') knocks down Robin Sylvester ('Ophelia Burn') of the Chemical Valley Rollergirls.



ABOVE: Referees make sure members of the Glass City Rollers have the proper safety gear.

Left: The Glass City Rollers hold a huge lead on the Chemical Valley Rollergirls as they battle.



TOP LEFT: Glass City Rollers teammates from left; Rachel Koester ('Looks That Kill'), Jessica Schadel ('Elle O'Hell'), Carmen Curran ('ReoCurran Nightmare'), and Alina Pabin ('Bobcat Molly') relax during halftime.

TOP RIGHT: Members of the Glass City Rollers and the Chemical Valley Rollergirls pose for pictures after their bout.

LEFT: Robin Sylvester ('Ophelia Burn'), left, and Kerstin Kitner ('Sybil Disturbance') of the Chemical Valley Rollergirls cheer after the national anthem is played to open their bout with the Glass City Rollers.

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