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Voices In Our Communities



## TOUGH BUT FUN-LOVING WOMEN BRING ROLLER DERBY BACK AROUND

BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ

*“As fast as a bullet, she can jam all night  
Makes a full-grown wonder bull die with fright  
She’s the queen of the roller derby”*  
— Leon Russell  
*“Queen of the Roller Derby”*

**M**onik Gutierrez is a nicely-dressed, well-coifed 46-year-old professional photographer whose art is to capture the loveliness of nature and the best of people.

When night falls her other side emerges.

Her makeup transforms from moderate to menacing. Her professional attire vanishes and her warrior gear wraps around her muscular body like improvised armor. “Pretty Woman” becomes “The Road Warrior” as quickly as thumbing the channel changer.

Monik surrenders to Mamarazzi 619. The beast is set free.

It’s derby night.

Roller derby is a rowdy sport dominated by athletic, rough-and-tumble women. It is more than 90 years old and narrowly missed being a sport in the 2020 Olympics, but is unknown to most Americans and an afterthought in the South County.

Mamarazzi and her sisters of slam are out to change that.

National City’s Mamarazzi is part of an underground sport that is not really under the



**“We are very supportive of each other and (roller derby) is a forum for different kinds of women to come together. You never hear about (roller derby) as a mainstream sport, but it was so inspiring to see women in a full-contact sport.”**

— MAMARAZZI 619, National City Roller Derby Queen

DERBY • PG 11

PHOTO BY CAMILA A. GONZALEZ / STAFF

**BACK ON TRACK** — After a lull earlier this century Roller Derby has come roaring back in popularity, driven primarily by women’s amateur teams. The sport is popular in San Diego County and is played in all 50 states and at least 50 nations around the world. Roller Derby is nearly a century old and was seriously considered for inclusion in the 2020 Olympic Games.



## DERBY

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*Rough and rowdy roller derby stars athletic, flamboyant women of all walks*

ground. Roller derby is played in at least 50 countries and all 50 states. Its popularity peaked in the late 1960 and into the 1970s when it was a televised professional sport, but it has never faded away. Today, in fact, roller derby is once again on a roll.

A proud Chicana, Mamarazzi is an elbow-throwing trailblazer in a sport born of white skaters in the Depression-era Midwest. Today's roller derby athletes are a rich mix of women from many races and every socio-economic tier.

"People will see all walks of life in this sport," she said. "We are all very welcoming of each other and roller derby is very welcoming all around. After each bout we are proud of each other and does not matter if we made mistakes. I love the camaraderie and excitement we have for one another."

## FUN AND INFECTIOUS

Rock-n-Roll Hall of Famer Leon Russell is hardly the first person to fall in love with roller derby on first sight. After a rollicking concert in Oakland, the Oklahoma singer-songwriter was trying to unwind in his hotel room when he came across a bout featuring the Bay City Bombers on TV. His "queen of the roller derby" was a sexy star who could throw a mean right hook.

"It was infectious fun," he said. "It needed a song, so I gave it one."

Roller derby's creation story is a little blurry and possibly embellished, but the accepted narrative is that the sport was invented by Chicago promoter Leo Seltzer and given its edge by legendary Windy City sports writer Damon Runyon. Seltzer started a touring league that was proto-punk and camp, but also legit. The women played for keeps and played to win.

During the late 1970s and up against the 21st century roller derby strayed from the true faith and often become scripted spectacles in the manner of WWF and other made-for-television performance sport. It was popular on TV in the 1960s and 1970s in some urban markets, but suffered a decline during the glum Reagan years.

Amateurs have resurrected the sport's integrity and popularity. There are about 1,250 leagues worldwide. Though roller derby is most popular in the United States, it also thrives in England, Australia, New Zealand as well as parts of Asian and Africa. Most leagues honor the brashness and tongue-in-cheek nomenclature of the American game.

Roller derby is played by two teams on an oval track. Each team fields five skaters at a time and may have up to 15 on a roster. Like hockey, teams send out lines of players for short but intense bursts of activity, then rotate in rested players.

Matches are called "bouts" and last for 60 minutes. During two-minute "jams" a player on each time designated as the "jammer" attempts to score points by lapping opposing skaters. "Blockers" work to prevent the jammers from scoring. Jammers score a point each time they lap a blocker. There are four points to be had if all the blockers are passed.

Bouts are often freewheeling scrums of flying elbows and hip checks evocative of rugby, hockey or football.

Players can land in the penalty box like hockey and score a four-point grand slam like baseball. Bruises are the most common injury, but the occasional concussion or broken bones mean medical personnel with stretchers are usually standing by.

## SLAMMING SISTERHOOD

Roller derby is fast, full contact and the domain of legit badasses, said Lisa Del Gado, 36, a member of the Winetown Rollers better known by her skate name Legatron 88.

"Being able to hit people is my favorite part of bout days," she said. "After a long work week, it is nice to have a release from that. In regular day-to-day life you cannot hit people, but in roller derby you can."

An eight-year skating veteran, Legatron said her team practices hard and is strategic like the NFL or NBA.

"I try to visualize everything we have practiced," she said. "I visualize executing for my team."

Legatron assures fans that her use of the word "execute" is figurative and that in spite of their hyper-aggressive bouts, roller derby skaters support and respect each other. Weekend combatants, like crabs, have hard exteriors but soft insides. "Play hard and leave as friends" is the ethos for a sport that is aggressive, but also an act of sisterhood that allows women a forum for physical and personal expression.

"There is a sense of unity," she said. "We come together to be rowdy and have fun, but also to push one another to be the best versions of ourselves."

Mamarazzi, who was throwing some wicked elbows minutes earlier, agreed.

"We are very supportive of each other and (roller derby) is a forum for different kinds of women to come together," she said.

A recent bout between San Diego Roller Derby and the Winetown Rollers was a flurry of fishnets, long legs, heavy makeup and hot wheels rumbling laps around the thundering rink. With just four minutes before the final whistle, the jammers give it their all in a desperate effort to grab the final points and victory.

Elbows and shoulder checks sent blockers wobbling, but not out. A timer blared and the skaters' hands dropped to their knees as they allowed their momentum to carry them around the track gasping for breath and dripping with sweat.

San Diego Roller Derby racked a 146 to 131 victory. Advil and Aspercreme will follow, but endorphins and euphoria fueled toothy grins on mascara-streaked faces.

For Mamarazzi it harkens back to her childhood and teens circling the old hardwood skating palace in National City and its Chula Vista counterpart on the corner of Broadway and Fifth Avenue near Chula Vista Middle School. For 26-year-old Olivia Hill, a first-time spectator, it was a moment of awe.

"These are great athletes," she said. "What impeccable balance! You never hear about (roller derby) as a mainstream sport, but it was so inspiring to see women in a full-contact sport."

Mamarazzi admitted that she relishes her Jekyll and Hyde avocation. So do her skating sisters Maiden China, Molly Tov Cocktail, Anne Smashaway, Sandra Day O'Clobber and Roly Mary Mother of Quad. Sometimes she has to explain the bruises to her photography customers, but she considers them badges of honor.

"It's all good, clean fun, verdad?"

Weekend warriors on wheels, the derby women rest up for Saturday night.

## BASEBALL TEAM WALLOPS GROSSMONT

BY JUAN H. ESTRADA

Jaguars vs. Griffins may not be Yankees-Red Sox or Dodgers-Giants, but the half century rivalry is intense nonetheless. The two teams were on collision course in a late season game with playoff implications.

And there was an actual collision.

Southwestern outslugged Grossmont 10-7 in a game that largely hinged on an umpire's out call against a Griffin baserunner who collided with second baseman Aiden Miller on a cover play that blunted a rally. Grossmont's manager went nose-to-nose with the ump, but the call stood and SC escaped.

SC's offense racked up one of its best showings of the season.

It needed to.

Grossmont got off to an explosive

start scoring three runs on soft singles amid poor pitching and worse defense. SC was lucky it was only three.

SC responded with three runs of its own and none of the hits were soft. Centerfielder Adrian Hinojosa hit a rocket to left and poor Grossmont defense allowed him to score. Two batters later leftfielder Aiden Perez blasted a two-run homerun to knot the game at 3.

The Jaguars struck again in the third inning, when third baseman Eric Nakano spanked an 0-2 pitch into the right field corner to give SC a 5-3 lead.

Pitcher Andy Canedo was cruising until the 4th when Grossmont strung together hits to score a run and threatened for more. On the first pitch the next batter hit a weak dribbler that first baseman Nico Vallarelli scrambled to his right to

glove. Second baseman Aiden Millan moved over to cover first base and in a bang-bang play had his extended leg on first base. There was a collision that sent the Griffins baserunner tumbling. Shouts from the Jaguars bench encouraged Millan to tag the runner for missing the base. The umpire called the runner out.

Grossmont's manager bounded out of the dugout to argue the call, to no avail. Two runs that had scored were taken off the board and a potentially huge inning for Grossmont was suddenly over.

SC scored in the 6th and 7th innings, capped by Hinojosa's two-run double.

Adrian Sanchez came in with one out in the ninth and Grossmont bringing the tying run to the plate. He got a quick three-pitch strikeout and a weak grounder to seal the 10-7 victory.

## TONI REPLACES TONIE AS FIRST WOMAN TAKES REIGNS OF TRACK TEAM

*Toni Smith, a four-time long jump All-American, succeeds her revered mentor Tonie Campbell*

BY DEVIN LAWSON

**WANTED:** Head track coach at Southwestern College. Must be a college All-American and a national champion who is fast and can jump. Must be cool and able to connect with a diverse team. First name of Tonie preferred.

**T**onie Campbell left big spikes to fill when he departed Southwestern College to become athletic director at Cuyamaca College in December. Unsurprisingly, Campbell skillfully mentored his replacement.

Toni Smith, the Jaguars' sprightly jumpers coach for the past six years, took over the head coaching position just before the season started – the first female track and field coach in SC history and a rare woman coach anywhere who coaches men.

The young men and women on the team like the call, especially former Jaguar triple jumper Amanda Shaw, who won the CCCAA State Championship last year as well as a full ride to UC Davis.

Smith said she is humbled by the thought of succeeding Campbell, but is ready to run with the top job.

"Tonie Campbell was a legend," she said. "So yes I'm very nervous but I'm going to let those nerves be the fuel to my fire. Coach believed that I was the perfect coach for his team and my goal is keep the winning culture alive, bring my A game and always be there for my athletes."

Campbell was a record-setting high hurdler at USC and an Olympic silver medalist. Smith also has an



Photo Courtesy of SC Track &amp; Field

**TAKING THE LEAP** — SC jumpers had been fans of their specialties coach Toni Smith for six years. Now the Oklahoma University All-American is the head coach, the first woman to coach men at Southwestern College.



**"This is a new challenge I am ready for. It's going to be a rollercoaster, but I will thrive and survive."**

**TONI SMITH**  
SC Head Coach Track & Field

impressive athletic pedigree. She was 4-time All American who broke the long jump record at Oklahoma University as a junior.

Even as a little girl Smith loved track, she said.

"It's just something about seeing the track that makes me feel free," she said. "I don't know if it's the breeze I catch when running or the euphoric feeling of doing a high jump and feeling on top of the world. I love it. It frees me mentally."

Smith is CEO of Total Starr Fitness and enjoys serving the community. Coaching the Jaguars track team fits that box.

"This is a new challenge I am ready for," she said. "I went from having seven athletes (in private training) to now being captain of the ship. It's going to be a rollercoaster, but I will thrive and survive."

## PCAC

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Alejandro Serrano set a new record in the Men's 200-Yard Individual Medley by touching in at 2:04.61. He joined Luis Serrano, Hanson Gallegos and Rujana to set a new record in the Men's 400-Yard Medley Relay with a time of 3:53.92.

A record fell in the Men's 200-Yard

Medley Relay thanks to Luis Serrano, Rujana, Hastings and Jake Osthimer. Alejandro Serrano's 4:23.99 in the Men's 400-Yard Individual Medley was yet another new SC record.

Rujana shaved more than two seconds off the school record in the Men's 100-Yard Butterfly and Luis Serrano broke his own record in the Men's 100-Yard Backstroke.

Matt Ustaszewski, head coach for the Swim and Dive Team for 20 years, said

he was pleased with his crew.

"Our student-athletes did an amazing job and we are very proud of their performances," he said. "They were dedicated and focused on swimming to the best of their abilities. It was great to see them achieve their goals and compete at such a high level."

Overall both teams took fourth place at the PCAC Championship meet. SC men scored 426 points, the women 264 points.

## SOFTBALL

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-- finished the season with batting averages over .300. The dynamic duo of Mendez and Harper both slugged over .500. Harper finished her incendiary season with six homeruns, a .371 batting average and slugging percent of .643. She also did a Joe DiMaggio/Tony Gwynn, walking more than she

struck out.

Iron-armed pitcher Mendez appeared in 35 of the 39 games. She completed 24 and racked up 14 wins, including several where she pitched both games of a doubleheader. Madison Villaescusa also recorded three complete games.

Jordyn Beatty led the Jaguars with 21 walks and tied with Daniela Sandez, for the team lead with five stolen bases without getting caught.