

RIVALS SKATE TOGETHER

The Arch Rival Roller Derby league creates community between the athletes and their fans (Photos by Michaela Manfull and Cherry Clark, Content by Michaela Manfull)



A blocker and a pivot on the pink team work to keep the black team's jammer from getting through. Blocker's helmets are normal, while pivots mount a large stripe and jammers boast a star.

Beth Henry, also known as **Jedi**, skates around the track during the final scrimmage of the night on Feb. 17.



While many who step onto the Midwest Sport Hockey rink on game night on Feb. 17 don their well-worn skates and flashy outfits, the Head Non-Skating Official (NSO) Steve Brown does not. Instead, he avoids the center of the track, where players warm up and makes his way to a table sitting on the far side. He's comfortable wearing his simple tennis shoes, jeans, a flannel shirt and a zip-up jacket. His white beard and grin make him instantly recognizable for all who've seen him before.

When Brown was younger, his friend invited him to a roller derby fundraising event, giving him his first exposure to the sport.

"It was an idea of something to do that you step outside the box," Brown, whose derby name is **Count Stephanos**, said. "Everybody does baseball, basketball, football, whatever. Step out of the box."

While he didn't catch a game the night of the fundraiser, he saw one a little while later when the men's national championships came to town. That's what hooked him.

"I watched it all weekend and decided 'I can do that,'" Brown said. "Well, I didn't skate as well as everybody else. So, I said okay, I can do the non-skating one. Progressively, I went up and became the only person that knows how to run it all."

Brown has served as an official for more than 12 years now, partly because of his love of the sport, but mostly for his love of the derby community. That community can be seen from the players battling it out on the rink to the fans in the stands. It's one of the things that people who are part of the fun keep coming back to when they talk about why they love roller derby so much.

"Roller derby is great and everyone is welcome at every skill level," Carol Hopfinger, also known as **Cruella**, a player on Arch Rival Roller Derby's (ARCH) All Stars team, said. "You don't have to know how to skate, you don't have to know how to play a sport, you

can have no athleticism in your bones at all, and it's just a great organization."

That community can even be seen when the adult skaters show up for their practices on Sunday mornings just as the junior derby players are finishing theirs. Two weeks prior to tonight's matches, at one of these practices, two junior skaters, Maeko King and Albie Wann, raced to their bags to remove their gear, giggling and attempting to trip each other the entire way.

Wann: [Roller derby] is football on skates with no ball.

King: Well, it's kind of like that, but it's not that hard.

Wann: Way more penalties.

King: Yeah. There are like thousands. I can't even remember half of them.

Junior derby is relatively new, only becoming its own thing in the past two decades, giving younger kids interested in playing a chance to learn the basics of skating and the rules of the game before they go onto play full-contact.

King, known as **Rocky Road**, and Wann, who goes by **Deenie the Meanie**, have played derby together for over a year. They frequently finish each other's sentences and fill in information about each other like an old married couple would— with just a little more energy. They race up and down the track to see who can yell the loudest while skating.

"The moment you start playing with ARCH, you automatically have friends," Hopfinger said. "If something were to happen and I'd say, hey, I need help with X, Y, Z, there would be 20 people willing to help with whatever I needed. If I needed to move, they would come and help me move. If I needed food, they would bring me food, if they needed to take me to the hospital because I broke something at practice, they would take me to the hospital."

While the two couldn't show their skills on Feb. 17 as there was no junior derby scrimmage, another new face made its way across the track that night. Emma Moscatello, whose jersey reads **Emakidd**, was finally cleared to play her first derby game that night. She joined ARCH after attending one of the bootcamps held every winter.

"I miss when we used to travel a lot," league photographer Bob Dunnell said. His derby name is **Mr. McWheellie**, but he doesn't use it often anymore. "We used to go to different towns and I've traveled literally around the world with Arch Rival so it's really

nice to see that kind of stuff coming back."

ARCH is part of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) and, as of just last year, is ranked number two on an international level and number one in their regional level in the U.S. As of now, the ARCH league has one junior team and three women's teams, those being the Fleur-de-Linquents, Nemesis and All Stars, their C-, B- and A-teams, respectively.

"For me, being able to be part of the All-Stars and continually trying to get play time with them I think is really cool because I was a little bit older when I started playing and it's just something that's really nice to be able to check off my list and participate in really competitive play with the top athletes," Hopfinger said.

During the games that took place on Feb. 17, each of the three teams played two scrimmages, ensuring each team played each of the others once. While not yet cleared to skate in games, first-year ARCH member, Rabia Polzin, could be found next to the announcer the whole night, manning a video

camera.

"I found out about derby because I was dating someone for most of last year who was also freshly new to the team, so I would attend practices to help keep an eye on her kid," Polzin said. "I attended games to support the team and from the minute I started hanging around, I just found this to be a lovely community of people who I really seemed like I wanted to be around more, not just as a plus one, but as part of the actual team."

Polzin, whose tentative derby name is **Cicada Lovelace**, has been working up to being able to play full-contact games with their teammates. While ARCH was originally Arch Rival Roller Girls, they changed their name in 2016 to Arch Rival Roller Derby "to reflect and include our transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming league members." They also have an affiliated men's league known as the Gatekeepers, which also has female-presenting players within its ranks.

"I'm single and I'm a co-parent," Polzin said. "My ex-wife and I have a toddler together and it's been pretty easy for me to work around both with supportive people in derby and outside. If I need someone to keep an eye on him while practicing, it's available. Also, no one worries if I'm showing up late to practice, like today, because I had to drop him off later than usual. I work a 9 to 5. It's easy for me to be here outside of that generally, and evening practices and weekends mean that it's worked pretty well."

No matter a person's identity or preferences, ARCH has a spot for everyone on their teams.

"It's an immediate group of friends that

you have from day one, which is really cool," Hopfinger said. "Especially as an adult, it's hard to make friends, it's just a weird situation, but it's immediate as soon as you step on the track."

Though there are a lot of newer faces to derby, when it comes to retiring, many players never really quit. They find themselves back on the track year after year, even if it wasn't in the same position they started out in.

"I was a skater for seven years," outside pack referee Kim Mason, whose uniform boasts the name

Sunday School Slammer, said. "I started playing in 2012 and I had heard about it for years before that. My job tonight was to watch the skaters from the outside of the track and watch for penalties."

There were plenty of penalties for Mason to call that night, as there are any time she officiates a derby game.

The night's final jam ends with the pink team keeping their hefty lead over the white team, sending players to the high five line as they chatter and make their

way off the track for the night. The crowd trickles out and the referees find their way to their locker room while Polzin and Brown help pack up the cords then follow suit until they are called back for the next contest. Members take off their jerseys, and, in turn, their derby names they don every time they're around their teammates.

They may be done for this game, heading home at 10 p.m., but they'll be up for practice tomorrow, Sunday morning, as always. That practice, they'll discuss what went well and what they could improve on and keep rolling forward together.



Two players hug as their final scrimmage of Feb. 17 at the Midwest Sport Hockey Rink ends. The black team played the first two games, but the players stuck around to cheer on the rest of their teammates that night.



Players communicate with each other as the jammers make their way down the track on Feb. 17 during the second scrimmage. This game was a very close matchup between the black team and the white team. Usually, roller derby games have two 30 minute halves, but for their season opener, the three usual ARCH teams were divided evenly and each played one 30-minute scrimmage against each other, allowing players of all skill levels to have an equal playing field.

WHO KEEPS TRACK ON THE TRACK?

Many different wheels turn all over the track to keep derby games rolling smoothly



Legal Name: Kim Mason
Derby Name: Sunday School Slammer
Position: Outside Pack Referee- Skates around the outside of the track to watch for penalties during the game.



Legal Name: Steve Dixon
Derby Name: Star-Spangled Hammer
Position: Game Announcer- Gives a play-by-play relay of the entire derby game through the loudspeakers.



Legal Name: Bob Dunnell
Derby Name: Mr. McWheellie
Position: League Photographer- Takes photos of every ARCH league game and travels with the teams.



Legal Name: Steve Brown
Derby Name: Count Stephanos
Position: Head NSO (non-skating official)- Coordinates all other NSO's during the game and runs the scoreboard.



WHO ARE YOU?
Scan the QR code to the right to find out what position on the track fits you best.



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