



FOTO: FRIDA HEDBERG

Roller derby began in the States in the 30s and disappeared inexplicably during the 70s. In later years a newly awakened interest for the both violent and entertaining sport- and now it is nearly an all girl competition.

A lifestyle on eight wheels.

Tackling, blood, sweat and tattoos. The tough American women's sport roller derby is spreading itself all over the world. Svenska Dagbladet (Swedish Daily mail) has met London Roller Girls, who want rugby on roller-skates to be Europe's new weekend entertainment.

London- First a thud. Then the screech of bare skin on an indoor gym hall. An unmistakable sound that inevitably will end in burn bruises. But Sugrrr Cain, who has been tackled to the floor when she tried to get past Rushin Rollette, Bambi Manslaughter, Mae Belle Mayhem and the others in London Roller girls, is quickly back on her eight wheels again. -It is a quite aggressive sport, But we practice falling a lot, says Sugrrr Cain, whose name is really Lauren Langston. She has big tattoos, a silver coloured helmet and short pink shorts, which match the wheels of classic quad skates. From the three cords around her neck dangle a stopwatch, whistle and a mouthguard. A year ago the 29 year-old from American Michigan moved to London to study costume design. She is

Facts

When the sport was first started the teams were made up of both men and women. Now roller derby is almost exclusively a women's only sport. Guys are mostly referees, point-counters or coaches. One match is made up of three 20-minute sessions. Each session itself is divided up into separate "jams", short skate periods of two minutes max. After a short 20-second break the players regroup for the next jam. Five players from each team are on the oval track at the same time. Eight of them position themselves in a line and begin to skate when the referee's whistle blows. Shortly after it blows again and the remaining two (one from each team) start skating after the pack. These "jammers" need to get past the group and complete a lap to score points. The players try to prevent the competitors' "jammer" from getting through by tackling and blocking, but it is not allowed to pull someone to the ground using your hands.

still studying- but more of her time is spent with the roller derby-team, which she put together.

The sport is played by five quad-skate sporting players from each team find themselves on the track at the same time. In each team is a point hunter; the "jammer" has to get past the competing players by tackling and blocking, trying to stop her at any price.

The team, which has the most points, once the game is over wins. Due to it being gritty and rough on the track several referees are often required to keep an eye on the point scoring. Players who break the rules can be banned or even points can be awarded to the opposing team.

Links

Londonrollergirls.com
Wftda.com
Gothamgirlsrollerderby.com

Roller derby was born in the USA under the depression at the beginning of the 30s and quickly reached its peak of popularity, thanks mainly to the uncommonness of mixed teams with both men and women competing. Madison Square Garden in New York was sold out for an entire week during the teams' final game in 1949. Over 50 000 spectators came to see the match between Midwest Pioneers and Los Angeles Thunderbirds in Chicago in 1972, and the same year the actress Raquel Welch played a derby girl in the movie Kansas City Bomber. Due to rows and teams breaking up and dividing the interest began to dwindle in the 70s. TV companies have since then, in equal gaps, pumped money into trying to reawaken roller derby, but without any greater success. Until now when the game is growing at an explosive rate again. This time as a women's underground movement, with roots in Austin Texas. Today, there are about 140 women's only roller derby teams over the entire USA. Europe is next in line. Already now there are teams in Stuttgart and London and a new team in the making in Birmingham. Among the players bruises and scrapes are more rules than exceptions. As are fishnet tights, short skirts or shorts and a cocky attitude. Because roller derby is more than a game, it is a stylised, sweaty and adrenalin rush inducing form of entertainment. Provocative and sexy- as far from squeaky-clean cheerleading as you can get. For an inexperienced spectator warm-ups look at first chaotic and violent, like rugby on wheels. But the rules are soon made apparent and it is easy to understand the charm and draw; to relentlessly throw oneself on the midst of the group and fight past the other skaters with sweat dripping and music pumping.

The twenty-nine year old Drolma Price in London Rollergirls pulls her sleeve up and presents a large wound on her elbow. -When I got this I only felt more competitive, she says and laughs. During the day she is a social worker. Teammate Rachel Havner works for the music channel VH1 and April Lorren has an influential job at an international company in the finance business. At night in the practice space in East London the three transform into Bam, Rushin Rollette and Bruise Violet. It is obligatory to all the roller derby players to take on a skate name, which is registered on an American database (to prevent stage-names from being all too similar). When Drolma Price laces her skates and straps on her knee guards, she completely enters the role of Bam, action hero on wheels.

-It's a very good way to remove yourself from work and stress. I also feel as if I have a new family, I knew hardly anyone when I

moved to London, says Drolma, who like the majority of the girls in the team are Americans who recently moved here.

London Rollergirls will soon enough have a large enough group to be able to divide themselves into three separate teams and create their own league. They have been written about in the entertainment magazine Time Out and each month they hold well-attended promotion nights to collect money and spread the Roller derby word in Europe. In the America the sport's recent comeback has caused a debate as to which direction it should take. If it should primarily be a competition, as the rock hard Gotham Girls Roller Derby in New York think, or if it should be a pre-decided entertainment *à la* wrestling. In Delaware there are girl teams who fight scantily clothed in Jell-O to collect money. And in Texas pre decided fights occur to please the guys in the audience. –In Texas there is a team, which has devised a special punishment for players who break the rules. They have to skate past a row of guys in the audience, who spank them on the ass with ladles, says April Lorren who moved to London from Austin last year. But that is not how it is going to be in London- she says decidedly. London Rollergirls consider such publicity stunts as cheap ways of getting money viewers- but it is a far cry from their definition of roller derby.

-We see it as a sport. It is about encouraging and empowering women, to show that we can do what we want. We have had several requests to be in documentaries but we are being a little careful because we don't really know what they want to do. We don't want to be a bunch of sell-outs but its fun that people are interested, she says and poses with her teammates for an other picture.

This Saturday night London Rollergirls is having a Halloween party in a bowling alley in central London, to further spread the derby-message. April's colleague Yusuf Chadun watches the girls in amazement in their challenging horror costumes, gliding around on their skates while a band is playing and a documentary about roller derby plays non-stop in the screen.

-I have never seen anything like it before, in England or in Europe so it's sure to be a hit. This may be the next big thing, even if I doubt it will be in the 2012 Olympics, he says and laughs.