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FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

Derby Girls don skates, skirts, snarls

By Kara Andrade
STAFF WRITER

"SKATOMASOCHIST," "Nancy Drew Blood" and "Holly Terror" are just a few of the Bay Area Derby Girls (B.A.D. Girls) who put on their fishnet stockings, black lipstick, skimpy yellow skirts and skeleton crossbones helmets during the season opener in Oakland.

More than 700 fans packed the Dry Ice venue Jan. 23, with some standing in the rain for up to an hour before the doors opened. Family members rented buses and made large signs like "Your Mom," which they held against the safety glass of the rink.

"A lot of people think we're easy party-girls, but they have no idea we're teachers and moms and nurses," said referee "Tex Hit'er" (Leah Peterson, 30) of Alameda. "(Roller derby) is what we do for fun to get out our aggression out."

Peterson is one of many moms on the team. Her three children, Keely, 11, Macey, 9, and Syndy, 8, go to Lum Elementary School, where she is the art docent. She has also been the PTA president for two years.

She's been roller skating since she was 4 and never gave up on the dream of being on a team. The first time she wore fishnets in her life was when she joined the San Francisco Derby Girls last year. She calls it her alter ego and doesn't see any contradiction in being a part of the league and her life "by day."

"It's fun because it's like putting on a show and having fun. We're girls, we love to play dress up. I wouldn't wear my fishnets outside of here," Peterson said.

She said the league often attracts moms because the hours of night practice are convenient. She said the moms also share common tomboy interests and love to skate.

"We're not babies, we're not sissies; you can get out there and have a good time and get hurt and get back up in the morning and feed the kids," Peterson said.

Inspired by dozens of burgeoning leagues in cities such as Austin, Phoenix, Seattle, Los Angeles and New York, their Web site states that these women decided to begin their own all-female, full-contact roller derby league.

The league, which has been around since August 2004, consists of two teams, the San Francisco ShEvil Dead and The Oakland Outlaws.

The league is following in the footsteps of roller derby.

The San Francisco Bay Bombers, Eastern Red Devils, Northeast Braves, Midwest Pioneers, Ohio Jolters and other teams would appear and disappear, writes Joe Blenkle. He documents the history of roller derby on the Skatelog Web site.

Leo Seltzer created roller derby back in the 1930s when the first game was skated on in August 1935 in the Chicago Coliseum, with more than 20,000 people watching.

Seltzer changed the sport in 1938 when sportswriter Damon Runyon suggested to Seltzer that contact should be included in the game.

Former professional skater Harold Caldwell, who won awards during his 30-year skating career, volunteers as security guard. He played in Japan and Hawaii and competed with his brother.

"As a jammer, I look forward to the toughness of the game and the blocking involved.

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These sports show people how tough women are and how they don't mess," said Caldwell.

The resurgence of roller derby is seen in TV shows like "Rollergirls," a docudrama about women who love roller derby that runs Mondays on A&E.

In addition, the Castro Theatre in San Francisco had a weekend run of three popular roller derby movies, and there's a long a line of recruits, called "rinky dinks," waiting to be let in to the league.

Melanie Elliott, 35, of Pleasant Hill has been a rinky dink for the Oakland Outlaws, filling up water bottles, cleaning spills, skates and helping with maintenance for more than two months.

"I would lick the girls' skates clean. This is my life-long dream. It was either be a 'Solid Gold' dancer or be a race car driver. It's skate or die," said Elliott who has a 5-year-old son she calls "Ax."

Many of the skaters' families and husbands support the league by volunteering as referees or baby-sitting during late-night practices.

"El Jefe"(Jeff Souza, 31) of Oakland is not only one of the main referees but a father and husband to "Holly Terror."

"It's a great form of exercise and I totally support her," Souza said. "Besides, I like the speed and aggression of the game, all of it is fun."

Toshia Struve, mother of speech pathologist "Roxy the Riviter" (Brittany Struve, 27), filled up one-quarter of the rink with 30 members of her family. She rented a bus to transport them from Monterey that evening.

"This game is frightening and exciting. It's theater. I like that they get to express a side of themselves they normally wouldn't and to enjoy it."

"Kitt Turbo," who identified herself as stay-at-home mom, said her mother and her son enjoy the sport and are used to the bruises she brings home.

She loves the game.

"This isn't your mom out here boutng," she said.

Their next competition will be this month in Tucson, Ariz. For details go to: bayareaderbygirls.com/index.html

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