

Girls Rev Up Derby Revival



Local Team Gets Rolling

Gliding around the outdoor rink on old-school roller skates, the Boardwalk Brawlers are dressed as sassily as they can be for the bitter cold. They've layered leggings under plaid schoolgirl-style mini skirts, woolly legwarmers over fishnet stockings.

It's a Wednesday night at the rink just off Doc Cramer Boulevard in Stafford Township, and the fledgling all-female roller derby team is braving the winter weather to practice a sport that has recently gotten rolling again in grassroots leagues.

The women go through a series of exercises designed to strengthen their balance and pinpoint their centers of gravity. The Brawlers skate in a line, linked hand-to-hand, then each teammate in turn weaves in an S-curve down the line under each set of outstretched arms.

Then comes a mock scrimmage: a roller derby match in miniature.

The Brawlers break into two packs, each consisting of several "blockers" and one "jammer." When the scrimmage begins, everyone starts skating around the perimeter of the rink, the jammers attempting to break through the opposing team's pack, while the blockers attempt to hinder her progress, often with a firm body-check. The blockers also work to propel their own team's jammer forward, often by pushing or pulling.

Jammer Heather DeForest, a lightning-quick Long Beach Island native with a studded belt and preternaturally orange hair, easily flies to the front of the action.

DeForest's countercultural looks are common in modern-day roller derby, which has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity thanks to grassroots efforts of young women

inspired by punk rock's do-it-yourself ethos.

Roller derby has been around since the 1930s; the sport's mainstream popularity peaked in the '50s, '60s and early '70s, when bouts were televised. Then the sport was all but forgotten until the late '90s and early 21st-century, when all-women leagues began to form.

In 2004, the Women's Flat Track Derby Association was founded to promote the sport. Today the association counts 30 member leagues — most with multiple teams — in metropolitan areas across the country. And that's not counting banked-track or unaffiliated teams.

The Boardwalk Brawlers are relatively new to the scene, having formed only about two months ago when Leslie Adam, owner of the boutique Fate in Manahawkin, had a conversation with a customer who had recently moved down from North Jersey, where she had played derby.

Realizing there was no regional roller derby team at the Jersey Shore — the closest teams and leagues were in Philadelphia and New Brunswick — the two women decided to start one, reaching out to recruit friends, acquaintances and Fate customers from around the area.

"We pretty much just called our best friends and went for it," Adam said.

Although the other founding member has since left the team, the Boardwalk Brawlers has grown by leaps and bounds since it began, and the team now numbers about 10 committed skaters.

The Brawlers have adopted cheeky tough-girl nicknames and personas, as is standard in modern-day roller derby.

Co-captain Meghan "The Mechanic" Callaghan from Forked River is actually a mechanic by



trade, but says there is another reason for her nickname.

"It's also like a mafia term for disassembling bodies and getting rid of them," she said with a laugh. Figuratively speaking, "that's what I do on the rink."

The sport's participants prize clever individuality. Team captain Laura "Crash on" Gendwila, a Freehold resident, said the girls must carefully check their names against an international roster list of register names, numbering almost 8,000 members and teaming with characters such as Audrey Headburn and Sybil Disobedience.

Uniforms are still in the planning stages, so for now the

Continued on Page 42

SKATE FEVER: (Clockwise from top left) Leslie Adam and Heather DeForest strike a pose. Adam puts on pads before practice. Team members test their balance. Captain Laura Gendwila leads the girls through stretches.

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Roller Derby

Continued from Page 40

girls dress according to their personas. "I've got the yellow and black - like Crash Test Dummies - going on," said Gendwila, who skates in a yellow headband, yellow kneecocks and black plaid skirt.

But the Brawlers do not need uniforms just yet. They still have lots of learning to do before they are allowed to bout with another team.

For now the members carpool to Rollway Roller Rink in Hammonton every Wednesday night to boost team morale and hone their skills, holding drills and mock scrimmages. Occasionally they'll meet to skate outdoors at the Doc Cramer rink, too.

In recent weeks, the North Jersey-based Garden State RollerGirls have invited the

Brawlers to their Monday and Tuesday night practice sessions. It's far, said Gendwila - the RollerGirls practice in Newark - but it's been worthwhile.

"It's really great practicing with over 40 girls," she said. "They've accepted us with open arms."

Before the Brawlers can bout, the team also must raise funds, find sponsorship, and generally publicize itself. Gendwila said members are hoping to put the Boardwalk Brawlers name out there when they attend the East Coast Derby Extravaganza at Sportsplex in suburban Philadelphia next weekend.

"It's two full days of bouting," she said. "We all got hotel rooms. It's gonna be a blast."

More information on the Boardwalk Brawlers is available at <http://www.myspace.com/boardwalkbrawlers>.

— Heather Pharo

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Sports

Continued from Page 39

point to make it 6-4 to try one last shot. He missed and his season was over.

What makes Carson's effort in A.C. and indeed his efforts all season long so impressive is that he routinely spots his opponents pounds galore. He went in just under 200 pounds on Sunday while Silvestro was wrestling at the limit. And don't forget, Carson had plenty of heavyweight matches during the course of the season.

Gutsy, aggressive and now plenty experienced, this guy is going to be the favorite next time around. No doubt about it, Southern wrestling fans are going to have plenty to cheer about in 2008.

Alas, the Rams will have to make up for the loss not only of Molinaro and Lanno, but also of two other seniors who made the trip to Atlantic City, Keith Dillard and Josh Cipolla.

Dillard, who earned fifth-place honors in Boardwalk Hall last year, had a rather disappointing tournament this time around. He got off to a great start in the pre-quarters, earning a 9-0 major decision over Cherry Hill East's Andre Harmon. But he suffered a 5-3 loss to Hillsborough's Frank McLaughlin in the quarters (McLaughlin would go on to prove his toughness in the title match against Winston, where he lost 7-3 but at least put an end to the golden boy's pin streak).

Disaster struck in the wrestlebacks. He was up, 2-1, over Old Tappan's Matt MacLean, but when he slammed his opponent down to the mat, MacLean could not continue and was awarded the match by injury default. You've gotta wonder how bad MacLean was hurt - he pinned his foe in just 57 seconds in the next round of the wrestlebacks, took a 6-5 decision in the consolation semis and, on Sunday, took third-place honors at 152 pounds with a 2-1 decision over Dustin Deckard of Pennsville.

At any rate, you have to wonder, don't you? One Southern wrestler has his dream stolen because officials said he wasn't aggressive enough while another had his career end because he was deemed too aggressive. It's a strange sport.

Cipolla, meanwhile, was quickly eliminated on Friday, losing a preliminary round decision to Sparta's Phil Takacs-Senske. But he went out honorably, losing by only one point, 2-1.

All that said, I still feel Southern will have a pretty good wrestling team next season - maybe not a great team like the school has had the past few years, but a solid squad for sure. How can I say that? Simple. Besides Carson, the team will feature several wrestlers who advanced through District 24 competition to the Region VI tourney, including 125-pound district champ Brian Broderick (a sophomore), his classmate Jason Walters (119), junior Nick Mangeri (130) and yet another soph, Frank Miele (135).

More importantly, Southern has built a tradition and a solid feeder system. You had better believe some stars we haven't even heard of will pop up on the radar screen next campaign.

Something More

To Cheer About

Wrestling - believe it or not - didn't pro-

vide the only high school sports action last week.

Both Southern Regional basketball teams, for example, were still in action. I'm sorry to report, though, that they're not anymore.

The boys hung tough last Wednesday in the South Jersey Group IV quarterfinals but the seventh-seeded Rams finally fell to Pennsauken, the tourney's two seed, 67-63. Southern, trailing 50-39 after three periods, made a furious comeback but unfortunately had too much ground to make up. Joe Tomczuk led the Rams with 18 points, including three three-pointers.

The girls, too, didn't slip quietly into the night. They took on Absegami, the top seed in the South Jersey Group IV tourney, last Wednesday and lost, 60-53. But they trailed by only a single point with less than two minutes remaining. Not bad, not bad at all for an eighth seed. Lauren Tromm led the Rams with 20 points while April Smith added 14.

The boys ended up with a 19-9 mark for the season; the girls were 17-11. Two more-than-respectable teams for certain.

Another week, I'm afraid, that this column has been dominated by news out of Southern Regional. The other area high schools, Pinelands and Barnegat, simply haven't had that much to cheer about this winter.

Let me rephrase that - Pinelands did have something to cheer about, thanks to its cheerleading squad. Last week I told you how the Wildcats had been named the Grand Champions in the Ocean County Championships. Now I'm glad to report they didn't let up at this past weekend's New Jersey State Championships. They beat approximately two dozen other teams to win the New Jersey Group III championship at Trenton's Sovereign Bank Arena.

How good is this squad? Let's put it this way: The girls and coach Marybeth Sundermann were disappointed they finished only in second in the Large Varsity competition behind St. John Vianney. And SJV is a six-time state champion!

"It's a completely different score sheet than the national score sheet," said Sundermann. "It favors the more NCAA-style teams who are not quite as athletic. They have a lot more dance and jumps and... are a little more flashy; we're more athletic with more tumbling."

And now, folks, it's time to follow a different trail for a few weeks, at least as far as this column is concerned. That's because the spring sports won't start up right away and I'm going to use this space for a few one-subject articles instead.

For example, next week I'll almost certainly be writing about sports psychology. That's because a woman I met swimming at the St. Francis Center pool one day, Doreen Greenberg, Ph.D., is conducting a workshop this Saturday titled "Mind Power: The Mind-Body Connection in Sport." She described it as an introduction to the science of sports psychology, and it is part of the Science Saturday series at the LBI Foundation in Loveladies. It will kick off at 1:30 p.m.

It could prove to be interesting. Can't make it? Well folks, that's what intrepid sports reporters are for.

I'm only saying so long, not goodbye.

— Rick Mellerup

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