

ROLLING SISTERHOOD

THE COOLEST SORORITY IN TOWN



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WHEN SKATE WORLD CLOSES ON MONDAY AND WEDNESDAY NIGHTS, *the Rollergirls of Southern Indiana step into the building with purpose. Their scheduled practice approaches as each woman unzips a backpack or suitcase with all their gear. It's a flurry of activity as they all strap on helmets, knee pads, elbow pads, and stick plastic or rubber mouth guards against their teeth.*

ROSI, Evansville's non-profit women's roller derby league, started in August 2007 under the important principles of skaters managing and operating their own organization. They claim the first flat-track roller derby bout in Evansville (December 13, 2007). A few weeks ago, they were kind enough to let me sit in on one of their practices. Not knowing what to expect, I took a notebook and my trusty recorder; I figured I'd need lots of notes to understand what was going on. I was right.

You'd think a roller derby practice would be chaotic. That's what I thought, at least at first, when I sat down at a table to watch the girls practice and try to get a grasp of what the sport was all about.

On this particular Monday, the group of 26 skaters that made up ROSI skated out onto the floor for a series of exercises in control. They formed a tight pack, grouped within inches of one another. It's amazing to watch them all maneuver around the track without trip or careen out of control. At times, I'd hear names being called out. These two skaters would drift in front of the pack and skate separately from the group.

The exercises, which include stretching in a circle, serve to ready the girls for the main part of their practice; an extended scrimmage period broken up into thirty minute sections. During the stretching, the team discusses upcoming promotional events and other matters. This is no disorganized meeting. Each girl serves on at least one committee, and all of them work together to make ROSI run smoothly off the track.

It's during the scrimmage period that I get most confused. Instead of doing the smart thing and reading up on the sport, I figured it'd be easier to grasp if I simply watched it. Wrong. It takes a few sessions, or jams, before I begin to even grasp what's going on.

Kimmie S'more, as she's known to fans and the other women on the team, skates over to me during a break and takes a seat.

"Got it figured out yet?" she asks. When I just laugh, she launches in a quick (and helpful) explanation of what's going on.

I'll skip the lesson here because it really helps to see what's going on when it's being explained. At the end, she just laughs and says, "Well, the rules are 38 pages long."

Kimmie, who started her roller derby career three seasons ago, joined up when she came to a league meeting and essentially towered over the rest of the group. Her competitive streak shines through a little as she smiles.

"I knew I could take those girls," she says.



ROSI pivot, Wallop of Daisy dominates the front of the pack against the Derby City Rollergirls.

What's funny is that despite the tough-girl personas you find in the group's photos and all the pseudonyms, there's a very clear sense of—and I hate using this cliché—sisterhood on the team. They cheer for one another during their scrimmages even as they're crashing into one another and jostling for position. I get the feeling this is what a sorority should really look like, once it evolves past all the stereotypical college crap.

After one girl spins and stumbles a little, Kimmie points to the girl who bumped her. "Even though that just happened, they'll hug each other later."

It's not all about the bumping and roughhousing for ROSI, however. They're an active part of the community through various fundraising activities. In the past, they've donated to charities such as the Vanderburgh Humane Society, breast cancer awareness, the American Red Cross, and other causes. Part of the benefit of being a non-profit group is that any money left over at the end of the season goes to a good cause.

The only time money gets used for the group is in order to fund the next event. Because their home rink, Swonder, is an

affordable place to schedule bouts, the community reaps the benefits. Roller derby events tend to last at least two hours and are a spectacle to behold, much like any other sporting event: team introductions, the National Anthem, lots of action interrupted by time-outs, penalties—it's cheaper than seeing a major league sporting event but just as exciting.

ROSI has their home opener on Saturday, April 10 at Swonder. They'll be competing against the Chicago Outfit, who quite honestly do not sound half as bad-ass and friendly as the women of ROSI. Tickets are, like I said, pretty affordable at \$6 in advance, \$8 at the door, \$5 for military personnel, and free for kids 10 and under. So go check out roller derby for a bone-crushing good time.

Mid-deadline update: ROSI is currently a Women's Flat Track Derby Association Apprentice team; they are expecting full WFTDA membership sometime during the middle of the season. •