

Roller Derby for Dummies

By Ali Walsh

What's a better way to spend a Saturday night than to watch a group of women slam into each other on roller skates? To my surprise after my very first experience watching the Old Money Honeys v. the Sakonnet River Rats (the winners of the night), not much.

I walked into the arena with little knowledge of the sport. Without seeing the 2009 film, *Whip It*, which tells the story of a teenage girl who discovers and falls in love with the game, I probably would have not even known it existed. Thankfully at the matches, Providence Roller Derby hands out pamphlets for the crowd that explains the most basic key points of the game, which is great for those (like me) who knew nothing about how it all worked.

The game, or "bout" contains two 30-minute halves, each broken up into "jams." In the jam, one jammer from each team and four blockers play both offense and defense to earn points for their team. The first jammer to break from the pack becomes the lead jammer. The jam ends after the lead jammer calls it off or until two minutes have passed. Whoever can get the most points at the end of the bout wins the game. Get it?

One may think roller derby is an underground event that not many people know or care about. However, if you actually go to a game, you'll see the large following the sport has in Rhode Island (and, for that matter, the world- it is under consideration to become an event at the 2020 Olympic Games). Returning fans brought fold-out chairs and set them up right by the rink to get the full experience and not miss a beat. During the match, players ended up, a time or two, in these makeshift stands after a hard hit, but the fans definitely did not seem to mind.

I enjoyed the first half of the match in an excited confusion. I just clapped when everyone else clapped, yelled when everyone else yelled and stood up when everyone else was sick of sitting down. Despite my bewilderment, I am proud to say that within one bout, I went from confused newcomer to screaming fan.

So next time you're bored of the same Saturday night scene, check out the RI Riveters, the Killah Bees, the Old Money Honeys, the Mob Squad, or the Sakonnet River Rats play against each other or a neighboring New England team. Bring a chair or sit on the bleachers, enjoy some food at the concession stand and maybe even find yourself at one of their infamous after-parties.

For a complete season schedule visit <http://providencerollerderby.com/schedule/>.