



The Kill Jills' 'Lexi Fatale', left, and the Rage n' Fyre's Alcoholly compete at the Flat Track Fever 2013 roller derby event at the Olympic Oval in Calgary, Alberta Saturday, April 13, 2013.

Photograph by: Stuart Gradon , Calgary Herald

The world-renowned ice was out and the space-age [Sport Court](#) was in at the Olympic Oval on the weekend.

Eighteen roller derby teams, stacked with female and male skaters from Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan occupied the Oval for Flat Track Fever, the largest Western Canadian tournament for the world's fastest-growing sport.

At the tournament, as at most roller derby bouts, cut-up T-shirts and frayed tights were ousted in favour of sleek, moisture-wicking jerseys and compression shorts.

For derby fans and skaters, it was a weekend in flat-track paradise. But to the uninitiated, it looked little like the rock 'em, sock'em roller derby of the past.

Roller Derby has come a long way since the sport's resurgence about a decade ago. After the popularity of televised, banked-track roller derby waned in the 1970s, it was revived in the United States in the early 2000s. In Western Canada, derby revved up around 2006, with the first leagues developing in Edmonton, Vancouver and Calgary.

In those early days, "it was just girls that wanted to get together and skate around and hit people and go for a smoke and some beers after," says Kim (8Mean Wheeler) Mackenzie, who has skated with Vancouver's Terminal City Roller Girls (TCRG) since the beginning and is now a member of Team Canada, too.

In early bouts, it was typical for fans to sit on the floor at the edge of the track to get in on the action, says Tracy (Trailer Park Tracy) Cuillerier, a longtime member of the Calgary Roller Derby Association.

"They were so close to the track that when we fell, we'd hit them and be covered in beer," Cuillerier says. "It was a little different than now ... it's not just a bunch of girls or boys hitting each other on the track. We train hard."

Now, it's less about the after-party (though spirited post-game gatherings are still a staple) and more about sports psychology, nutrition, strategy and about legitimizing the sport, Mackenzie says.

For some teams, such as Mackenzie's TCRG All Stars, that desire to be taken seriously as athletes has resulted in skaters dropping punny derby names from the backs of their jerseys in favour of their surnames.

"I don't know if it's going to work or not," Mackenzie says of the shift to surnames.

However, she notes it's already helping to conquer some outdated stereotypes about the sport's legitimacy.

While skater-owned roller derby leagues survive by holding practices at community arenas, parking lots and even abandoned buildings, mainstream opportunities are rising along with the sport's profile.

Mo (Quadzilla L.K.) Sanders knows a bit about the commercial side of derby. Sanders is something of a roller derby celebrity, having once starred on the '90s TV show RollerJam, which offered a scripted version of the sport. She now travels as a coach, owns the roller derby company Grn Mnstr and skates with a Men's Roller Derby Association team, the Puget Sound Outcast Derby in Tacoma, Wash.

"Commercially, it's going good," Sanders says. "I think people like where it's at. They don't want it to go too commercial because then you lose the whole grassroots feel of how derby started. . . . Do we want to go fully commercial and get sponsors telling us what to do, what to wear, how to look? Or do we want to keep it like how it is?"

Balancing the paycheque with the spirit of derby is a dream for some skaters, like Carla (Scarla Maim) Walquist, a founding member of the CRDA. "At first it was just a fun thing to do," Walquist says. "I think ultimately, it would be great if we could get paid to do this as a sport and quit our day jobs and actually put all of our focus into it."

Mackenzie, the owner of the Camp Pivotstar roller derby coaching company, calls herself a roller derby businesswoman by day and a roller derby skater by night. She wants to see recognition for the sport continue to rise.

While some in the sport are pushing for an Olympic Games appearance, Mackenzie calls that goal "extremely ambitious," but expects roller derby could eventually follow the Olympic path of snowboarding, and join the X Games first, or even the Commonwealth Games.

Until then, roller derby action continues in Calgary all year round.

Check out local league schedules at CalgaryRollerDerby.com and ChinookCity.ca

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