

METRO NEWS

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Girls go out in rollers!



Bronx Gridlock team, part of the Gotham Girls Roller Derby league, practice in Astoria, Queens, along with Zoe Logan, aka Beatrix Slaughter (inset). Photos by David Handschuh/Daily News



Bronx Gridlock team skates in citywide women's derby league

BY ABBY LUBY
DAILY NEWS WRITER

THE BRONX roller derby pack is jamming around its practice track.

Catcalls fly as players, elbows out, slam into one another as skate wheels pound the floor, sending up a noisy clatter inside an old warehouse in Astoria, Queens.

The 13 women speeding around the track are members of the Bronx Gridlock, one of four teams in the citywide Gotham Girls Roller Derby league, now gearing up for its new season.

The Bronx Gridlock, along with the Brooklyn Bombshells, Manhattan Mayhem and Queens of Pain teams, made up a Gotham all-star squad that captured first place last year in the Women's Flat Track Derby Association's national championship in Portland, Ore.

The Bronx Gridlock players, wearing uniforms of cadmium yellow, black-and-white checks,

miniskirts and fishnet stockings, get to shed their milder daytime personas to play rough bearing such names as Beatrix Slaughter and Kandy Kakes.

"I feel a little more outspoken and more aggressive on the track," says Nicole Williams, 25, aka Bonnie Thunders, whose day job is with a conservation organization in Manhattan.

But breaking away from derby sensationalism and its reputation as "acceptable trash" is becoming a growing trend.

"We can be sexy and hardcore while being athletes at the same time," said Zoe Logan, aka Beatrix Slaughter, 27, a pastry cook. "It's less about our characters and more about the sport," she said.

Roller derby leagues cropping up nationwide are pushing for a more professional profile. The raucous game of body crashes, thudding falls and screams comes only after long months of rigorous training and drills.

Getting on a team is not easy. This year, 90 women tried out for

the Gotham League and only 14 made it, training four times a week for three months before being drafted to play.

Most players are already athletically active and have the stamina for roller derby. But there is a high injury rate, and learning how to fall is a big part of training. Logan suffered a broken collarbone last season.

"I was broadsided in shoulder-to-shoulder contact and it was an unlucky point of contact, but a totally legal hit," she said.

The national association has stringent rules: penalties for using hands, elbows and arms. Blocking and jamming are allowed only with thighs, sides or shoulders. Leaning against opposing players to get them off balance is allowed, and so is booty blocking.

"That's getting low and wide in front of someone and making yourself an obstacle," said 5-foot-tall Mandy Moreno, aka Dainty Inferno, a 30-year-old market researcher.

"How often are you in an are-

na and have a thousand fans cheer when your name is called? We don't get a whole lot of cheerleaders in our everyday life," she said.

Gotham League President Natily Blair, aka Ginger Snap, plays on the Bronx Gridlock. The 32-year-old graphic designer has seen the league struggle to be recognized since its start more than six years ago.

"At first we didn't have a rink to practice in and we shuffled around from park to park, most times playing on the street. Those asphalt burns from falling really burned," said Blair.

The fledgling league eventually got sponsorships and donations, enabling it to purchase a \$25,000 portable plastic floor for skating.

Winning the national championship last year put the Gotham Girls league on the roller derby map, says Blair. "We beat the godmothers of the sport!"

For team information and schedules, see www.gothamgirlrollerderby.com.

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