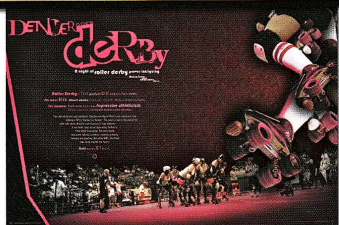


★ Melissa Taylor

Regular *MHSM* contributor Melissa Taylor loves freelance writing. In fact, she recently said, "Writing is a break from my other job - parenting." She's a roller derby "wannabe" looking for the perfect derby name. Readers? Here's what you must know about Melissa. She can be bribed with coffee. She loves the outdoors, books, the Denver Nuggets, telling it like it is and living an imperfect, full life. What should her derby name be? Find her on Twitter @MelissaWrites or email her at meltay@comcast.net.



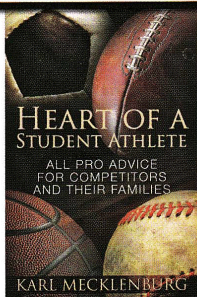
★ Pat Rooney

Pat Rooney may as well be a detective, which is one reason the talented scribe from the Midwest tends to get the "Where Are They Now?" assignments. In this issue, Rooney works the phones in an effort to locate Nuggets great Fat Lever. Now working with the Sacramento Kings, Lever appears to be happy and content. Rooney catches up with the point guard and relives a few fond hoops memories in the process.



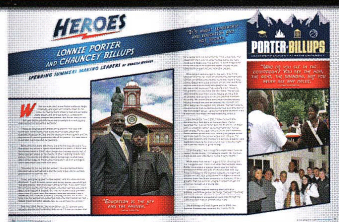
★ Karl Mecklenburg

Karl Mecklenburg is best known in these parts for his work on the gridiron. But what Broncos fans might not know is that No. 77 is pretty handy with a pen, as well. In our first ever "heroes" issue, *MHSM* felt there was no better contributor than Mecklenburg, one of the all-time great "community guys." In his new book, "Heart of a Student Athlete," Mecklenburg offers some all-pro advice to competitors and their families; we're proud to offer an excerpt from this useful and well-crafted book.



★ Vanessa Hughes

While Vanessa Hughes certainly knows sports, it could be argued that she knows *people* even better. This month, Hughes tracked down longtime Regis basketball coach Lonnie Porter and Denver Nugget hometown hero Chauncey Billups to talk about their work with the Porter-Billups Leadership Academy. Far removed from the basketball court, this effort is one of Denver's finest community outreach programs, and Hughes tells their story with her usual accuracy and passion.



MileHigh

SPORTS MAGAZINE

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Bill Swartz - standing in for Kyle Orton



DENVER DOES derBy

A night of roller derby proves intriguing

Melissa Taylor

words

Aaron Falley

photos

— **Roller Derby** = THE perfect DATE night. (You're welcome.)

for men: BEER. Short skirts. FISHNET TIGHTS. Girl contact action.

for women: Bad-ass chicas. *Impressive athleticism.*

DERBY NAMES. (The only good memories of junior high school.)

This roller derby ain't your grandma's. Grandma saw Raquel Welch trash talking and claw fighting in 1972's "Kansas City Bomber." The movie arrived at the peak of old style roller derby. Wrestler-style theatrics to huge stadiums.

If you haven't seen an old style derby, YouTube it.

Think WWE Smackdown. Old school derby was street fighting on wheels – clawing, grabbing, stomping, and punching. But unlike WWE, old school roller derby crashed and burned.

Until now. IT'S BACK.



I'm dateless. I head to the Fillmore anyway. The crowd must be 1,500. If I weren't married, I wouldn't be dateless long.

Loud music blasts. Think KBPI Rock – Metallica, the Ramones, Michael Jackson (okay, some pop), The Addictions, The Devil Spades, Leon Russell, Lolita Ford, Fighting Chance.

The music gives high energy at the bout (“game” in roller derby terms). At the Fillmore, men and women stand around drinking Pabst Blue Ribbon. The disco balls and chandeliers add funky ambience. The rink’s perimeter is lit up with twinkly lights.

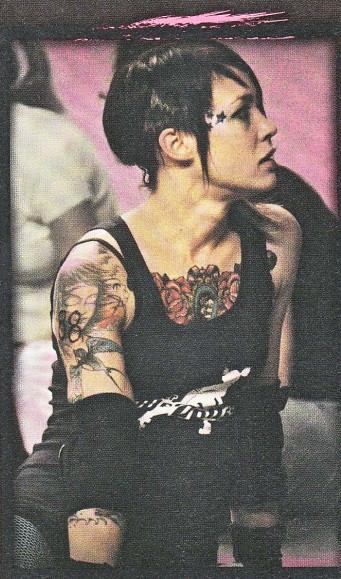
Finally, our wait is over. This league, the Denver Roller Dolls, sends out their B team – Bruising Altitude. Their enemy team is the Kung Fu Donnas. There are a lot of tushies hanging out of skirts or shorts. The Kung Fu Donnas wear loose light blue tops, bellies bulge and boobs sag. (Might I suggest support bras?) The women’s bodies of Bruising Altitude are harder and perkier.

When the jammer gets ahead of the pack, roars and screams fill the venue. The crowd knows derby. But I bet you don’t. So here’s a quick overview.

The team sends out five girls to skate at a time. I see a girl putting a star cap over her helmet. She’s going to be the *jammer*. She must get through the pack twice. After that, she scores one point for every opponent she laps. When she starts scoring, it’s called a jam.

So now you can imagine the strategy behind the hip thrusts and body checks. It’s all about the jammer. Either let your jammer through or try to stop the opposing team’s jammer.

Girls make full contact. Oh, yeah. These girls scrap, push and shove, whatever it takes. Hips, body and shoulders can be used for legal blocking. But there’s plenty of illegal blocking – elbows, forearms, pushing or grabbing. The penalty is only a short sit in the penalty box. No big deal. It happens in ice hockey all the time.



These girls
SCRAP, push
and SHOVE,
whatever
it TAKES.

Brad Example wears a pilot outfit and aviator glasses. He’s an announcer giving the action blow-by-blow. “Moustache Rider coming round, blocked by Primal Rage. Okay, folks, Repercussion’s calling off the jam.”

The girls skate lap after lap, changing out groups of five every few minutes. Fiona Grapple and Lulu Ferrigno, enemies on wheels, charge forward, trying to score. The announcer yells, “Don’t set your beer down near the bumpers.” Bumpers are the short upright mats around the perimeter of the rink. Next thing I know, three skaters crash into the bumpers. One flies over into a group of fans. The fans laugh and pick up the spilled beer. “I told you. Hold onto your drinks,” Example yells. The skaters jump back into the rink and the action.

The B team’s bout ends. The crowd roars approval. The A team, the league’s best team, plays next.

During the break, I try to make a phone call. Totally pointless. Between the music, the crowd noise and the announcers’ banter, you can barely hear a shout. It’s texting or nothing.

In the dressing rooms, the A team skaters stretch out and sit around empty boxes of Pasquini’s Pizza. This is the Mile High Club – the A team. Tonight, they play the West Texas Roller Dollz. One woman lies flat on the floor, stretching her leg up to her nose. Another few tighten up their skates. Then, the pack heads upstairs to get their game on.

“Ice Pick” is the team’s go-to guy. He tightens a skater’s wheel then mops the floor. Other guys dry behind his wet trail.

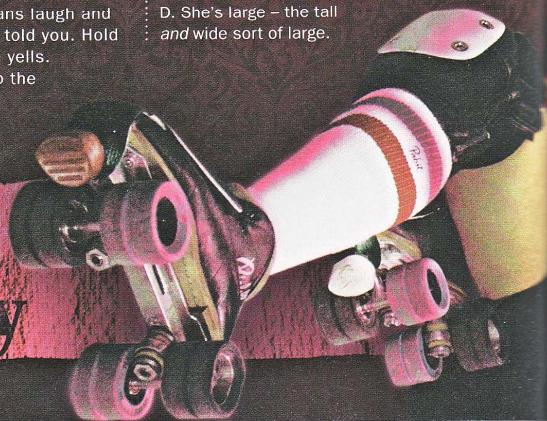
The referees group in the center of the derby rink. All wear striped shirts. That’s the only unifying part of their attire. The rest of their outfits are unique. One ref adds a dark kilt and combat boots. Another, a woman, sports white lace underpants over black tights. Yet another has a Mohawk on his helmet. The most noticeable is the male ref in neon pink tights. His legs look like stuffed sausages. Later, when he goes down in a crash, I spot his pink tights in the mess of legs, bodies and arms. Nice.

Like the referees, the roller derby players don the required helmets, mouth guards, elbow pads and knee pads. The Mile High team costumes itself in sporty shirts and black skirts. Girls wear colorful knee-high socks, mostly stripped. Tights are fishnets, ripped or holey. Skates are four-wheel quad stakes. The wheels’ colors range from bright yellow to dark purple.

Example and his co-announcer, Dumptruck, find fans to answer trivia questions for free swag. The sponsor banners are everywhere in the building. The free stuff gets the crowd’s approval during this break.

Example introduces the coach for the West Texas Roller Dollz, Tenacious D. She’s large – the tall and wide sort of large.

Roller derby



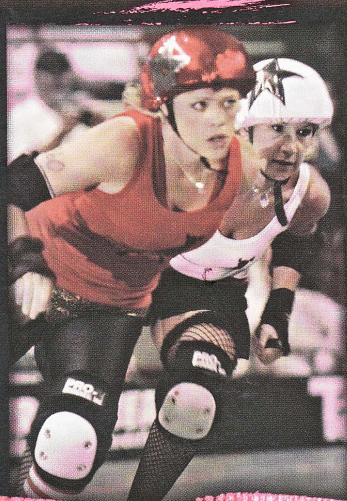
Wearing heeled black boots and a top hat makes her imposing. The rest of her attire? A black leotard, short black skirt, fishnet stockings, tux tails and a loud Texas drawl. She's the ringmaster without a whip, at this one-ring circus. She and Example introduce the teams to cheers and whistles. And the action begins.

These girls skate faster than the B teams. Their bodies are hard and lean.

Jonny Molfetta, 20s and ska-styled, drinks beer with his buddies. "There are not too many female sports I can get into, ones who have real athletic ability, no gimmick. It's not a lingerie show. It's not a modeling show. It's real and it makes sense to me. Plus, the Denver team is outstanding."

Oh, there's a gimmick. You don't get names like Frieda Beater, Assaultin' Pepa, Whipity Pow, Lethal Whoopin or Crash Dance and have no gimmick. The derby names, costumes and theatrics give derby the burlesque attitude that makes it an entertaining show. But this roller derby makes nothing up. There's none of the WWE fake action. The girls hit, block and push but not with a script. Roller girls kick ass and collide to win. Simple. Get more points. Win. That's the sport of roller derby.

The skaters kneel down on one leg and slide into the bench. The girls use the front brake to slow down or stop, too. But, the kneeling slide is the most common way to arrive to the sidelines.



Roller derby

70 JULY/AUGUST 2009 michigan sports.com

ABOUT THE BOUT

Derby **bouts** are played with five girls from each team. Bouts consist of two 30-minute periods and one 15-minute intermission.

ONE Jammer: Star helmet skater who starts 20 feet behind the pack and scores points each time she laps a member of the opposing team. She begins a few seconds after the pack with the second whistle.

Three BLOCKERS: Solid helmet skaters in the pack who try to prevent the opposing team's jammer from passing them as well as blocking to let their own jammer through the pack.

One Pivot: Striped helmet skater at the front of the pack, setting the pace.

The **Jammer** is the smallest and fastest skater. At 5-foot-2, Frieda Beater of the Rocky Mountain Roller Girls is one of their best jammers and former speed skater. To score, she must become the **Lead jammer** and break through the pack before the other team's jammer. Then, on the second lap through the pack, she starts scoring points for each person she passes. All further laps and passes are considered the **jam** and continue to score points. The jam lasts for two minutes or until the Jammer puts both hands on her hips to call it off.

BLOCKERS, like Granny Apple, who is 5-foot-11 and 190 pounds, block the other team's girls. Blockers body check – either to prevent the other team's jammer from getting through the pack, or to make room for their own team's jammer. They can help their jammer by reaching back, grabbing her hand, throwing her forward past the other team or **"giving a whip."**

The **A team** (also called the travel team) is the league's best team. The leagues have other teams called **B teams**. These teams are less experienced.

The medic runs over to a downed skater – she's clutching her elbow. The crowd gasps and quiets down – a little. All the skaters kneel while the medic assesses the situation. Ice packs. No broken bones. (Anyone slightly disappointed?) Who doesn't like the crashes? Chicago skater Jill Jaracz adds, "Girls get to see some women power; guys get to see girls in fishnets, and they won't get yelled at for looking."

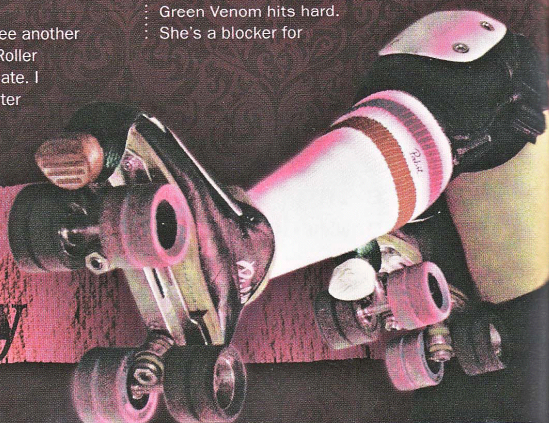
Told you. It's the perfect date.

I move on to the Bladium to see another league, The Rocky Mountain Roller Girls. But this time, I have a date. I drag my seven-year-old daughter here to see her friend's mom skate. The mom skates as

Green Venom. My daughter gets a Roller Girls t-shirt to show her derby pride.

I don't want a shirt. I do want a skater name. Any ideas?

This venue, a large gym, has bleachers and floor space. The lights are up. The music, loud but not deafening. Tonight, the B team, the Contenders, play the Oklahoma Victory Dolls. Whipity Pow jams for the Contenders. She's the smallest and one of the fastest skaters. On her second lap through the pack, she starts scoring points. Green Venom hits hard. She's a blocker for





the contenders. She's always looking behind her, ready to push when needed. She goes down. Rink rash must look funny when you're wearing fishnets. That's one kick-ass mama. Her sons, ages three and six, wear "Venom" shirts and sit with their dad.

The fan ages range from young babies to two toothless women. The announcer welcomes the 20-something group from the party bus. Other than the bus riders, it seems less of a party than the Fillmore, and more family fun.

An A team skater, Undertaker's Daughter, holds a large sign: "Ask me if you have questions about roller derby." She walks, stops to answer questions and continues milling about responding to fans' questions all night.

The large gray mascot, Wolfie, dances around the crowd. He waves to children and poses for pictures. During one pause in the action, Wolfie gives "Penalty Tickets" to laughing fans.

This show maintains the entertainment factor during halftime – with a group of trick BMX riders. The bike riders unfold two ramps. The air summersaults and high-flying acrobatics impress the entire crowd. When the riders finish, the pep squad shows up with some crazy lifts and tricks of their own.

The bout is fun. My daughter and I both think so. What about *that* date night? Special time

with the kids date night? At \$15 a ticket, it's cheaper than the Nuggets.

Ultimately, the Contenders kick butt. Their score is in the hundreds – 168. Their opponents, the Victory Dolls, score 68.

Both leagues, the Denver Roller Dolls and the Rocky Mountain Roller Girls, host after parties. Fans love to mingle with the derby girls. Most girls have a following, from their friends to derby aficionados. The MySpace page of Rocky Mountain Roller Girls' Frieda Beater shows she has 453 fans.

The two leagues are sanctioned by the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA.) Granny Apple of the Dolls tells me, "We are skater owned and skater run. We vote on everything, we do community service; every skater helps on a committee and pulls their own weight." Granny adds, "(The two leagues) are working together to host Western Regionals in October at the Bladium."

Get your skate on and check out a bout. Fights, crashes, legs, piercings, music. It's a counterculture sport on wheels. But not for long. I predict roller derby will follow mixed martial arts, exploding across America and into your living room. Get on board while it's still cheap.

And bring a date. **MHS**

ALL AMERICAN

Like basketball, Derby is an American invented sport. In the days of dance-a-thons, **Leo Seltzer** created an endurance type derby in 1935. **Coed** teams played on banked tracks, eventually in huge stadiums. By the early '60s, **contact** emerged as part of the sport. By the late '70s, the frenzy over derby died out and the sport faded out. Then, in 2004, Roller Derby – also known as Women's Flat Track – reemerged in Texas. The new roller derby teams were for women only and the skaters skated on flat tracks. Using flat tracks benefited the sport, because leagues only needed a large, flat space to begin. The Women's Flat Track Association (WFTDA) has rules and leagues, but their philosophy is "by the skaters, for the skaters," making it easy for leagues to form and grow.

WFTDA grew from five teams in 2005 to 79 leagues in 2009. Each league has multiple teams. WFTDA's **Chica Loca** writes that WFTDA puts out a quarterly magazine *Five on Five*, is working on a video game and is cross promoting with the Drew Barrymore movie **"Whip It!"** Currently, the league airs on MAV TV and Dish Network. Denver's two leagues play different venues. The Denver Roller Dolls play at the Fillmore. The Rocky Mountain Roller Girls play at the Bladium. Visit them online at www.denverrollerdolls.com and www.rockymountainrollergirls.com.

**The fan
AGES RANGE
from young
BABIES to two
TOOTHLESS
women.**

Roller derby

