



Down and Derby: The Insider's Guide to Roller Derby

Alex Cohen , Jennifer Barbee

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When most Americans hear the words “roller derby” today, they think of the kitschy sport once popular on weekend television during the seventies and eighties. Originally an endurance competition where skaters traveled the equivalent of a trip between Los Angeles and New York, derby gradually evolved into a violent contact sport often involving fake fighting. But after nearly dying out in the nineties, derby has been making a comeback. From a mere handful of leagues in the United States just a few years ago, there are now more than 17,000 skaters in more than 400 leagues around the world, with hundreds of thousands of die-hard fans. *Down and Derby* will tell you everything you ever wanted to know about the sport. Written by veteran skaters as both a history and a how-to, *Down and Derby* is a brassy celebration of every aspect of the sport, from its origins in the late 1800s, to the rules of a modern bout, to the science of picking an alias, to the many ways you can get involved off skates.

Informative, entertaining, and executed with the same tough, sassy, DIY attitude — leavened with plenty of humor — that the sport is known for, *Down and Derby* is the first and last book on derby you’ll ever need.

Down and Derby: The Insider's Guide to Roller Derby Details

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Aysha says

Not the most well-written or exhaustively researched, but will likely be of interest to those in the sport or wanting to play. Bit outdated now, but the history of derby and its influential players makes a worthwhile subject.

Samantha Brandt says

Love, love, loved this book! Ok, I'm a little biased since I play roller derby, but this book really breaks it down for you, better than "Rollergirl". It covers all the bases in derby, and even has coaching advice. It covers derby from the very beginning until now. Would recommend this book first and foremost to those interested in derby.

Maia says

The first half of this book was a pretty comprehensive history of roller derby (in its many iterations, including modern roller derby, both banked track and flat track), which I really enjoyed. However, the sport of modern roller derby has changed so much in such a short amount of time that the book, published in 2010, is already pretty out of date in terms of current rules, game play, and to some degree, derby culture. I also cringed every time the authors used cissexist assumptions and generalizations about derby skaters. The writing style was also a little too overwrought and punchy for my tastes -- and I'm someone who loves the crap out of puns and bad jokes (which is one of the things I love most about derby)! However, I still feel like I learned a lot, and I could tell the authors did their research pretty thoroughly -- I especially enjoyed all the little interviews and photographs they included.

Sonja says

Occasionally, when I'm feeling particularly brave and especially brash, I fancy joining a roller derby.

Reading the book - particularly the portions about the injuries one can sustain - hasn't really deterred me that much. It's like - a sort of desire that I'd actually go for if I wasn't such a pussy or something a Me from a parallel dimension would totally do.

Still, I'm pretty sure that once I move to a town with a roller rink, I'll pick up roller skating again. I've always liked it - lack of opportunity has inhibited my chances.

So anyway, all this is to say that the book was informative and cool. They have an interview with Ellen Page towards the end (because of Whip It) and she earned Brownie points for using Kurt Vonnegut as inspiration for her derby name.

=]

Abbey says

POPSUGAR 2018: a book about or involving a sport

Rae says

This was a great introduction to derby, especially if you are considering joining. I feel 100x more prepared for starting derby training in a couple of weeks, because this book spends just as much (if not more) time talking about actually playing the game as it does talking about the history, TV shows, and movies based on the game.

There are interviews with actual players throughout the book. I truly appreciated the inclusion of an interview with a woman who was paralyzed in a roller derby accident. If you are considering trying a full contact sport, it seems really valuable to include the potential real life consequences alongside the cute outfits and rowdy parties.

The book offers advice on gear, picking names (and where to find the national registry to make sure you don't copy someone else's), the time commitment involved, and how to get involved if you don't want to hit anyone while on skates, but still want to take part in the fun. Basically the full package, specifically for people who are wanting to play the sport.

Aliesha says

Now dated due to the changes to derby rules, but a fun intro to the sport.

Steven Gaskin says

I think you need to time the reading of this book to get the most out of it, finding the right point in your Derby education to open yourself up to the background. I loved reading about the history of the sport, including the beginning of the current renaissance, but I think I've been involved in the sport too long now to take much away from the rest of the book, specifically the more reference-based sections describing the rules and intricacies of the sport. The background material is fun, and the profiles on players/refs/announcers is great, but I'd have had to come to this book about 6 months ago to feel it had delivered a 5-star read. For a newcomer to the sport, this is the definitive book to read.

Jamie says

When I picked up this book, I began reading with hopes that I'd get a thorough history of the sport. While this book is only partially a history, it provided me with so much insight into the passion, skill, and dedication behind the sport that I didn't mind swerving from a historical narrative toward a living and breathing narrative at all.

I highly recommend.

Rose says

If you're new to derby, this is a great book to read because it outlines everything from the history of the sport to the details of its modern revival, to roller derby as it is portrayed in pop culture. It also gives useful tips and advice for fresh meat skaters. And even if you don't plan on becoming a derby girl, there's tons of information on other ways you can get involved in the scene (refing, becoming a non-skating official, commentating, or just being a fan). This book was actually pretty accurate in terms of letting me know what to expect when I joined the local derby league.

Lani says

I got this a few years ago at a tournament and read it then. I'm not sure what made me pick it up to re-read it this time.

The book certainly suffers a bit from roller derby's rapidly changing rule structure and culture shifts. However the authors do a decent job of talking in general terms that apply to a variety of leagues and approaches to the sport.

It's a decent book with an 'intro to the derby culture' approach. It doesn't get too bogged down in rules and speaks more to the history of the sport, both pre and post-revival. Most of it is stuff I learned while playing, but I think the sport has grown so much that some of the 'oral history' of roller derby has been lost on newer skaters. It's nice to have this book to remind people of the fun and silliness that used to be involved.

A note: several of the photos are captioned incorrectly. Not a big deal, but kind of an annoying detail that makes you wonder what other details were missed.

Jamie says

Fact based expose about female roller derby, working through its history, how to play, and a bit about the players. The interviews are mostly with 1990-2010 roller derby participants. A book directed towards those interested in playing roller derby.

Roller derby once attracted up to 50,000 spectators a game. Today, 1000 might be the norm. Women's leagues are gaining traction around the US and a few other countries; men's leagues have not caught on.

Me, I'll pay to take in a roller derby game to check it out, as I did with the book. Single read.

Terri says

Maybe I was at the wrong stage in my derby career when I read this because it was fun and fluffy for me and the only thing that really held my interest for too long was the bios. But I think if you are considering joining derby or just signed up as freshmeat this is a must read! I purchased it thinking I would get some info on the management of a successful league but mostly it focused on the individual and decisions to join, etc. So although it didn't contain the info I was looking for I still enjoyed it. Also I think a new updated version when discussing league communications may be in order to include new technologies such as Facebook and Twitter.

On a note completely unrelated to the content of the book itself. I purchased an epub version of this book for my e-reader and there were a few annoying formatting issues that need to be corrected:

1-the default text is extremely small print I had to adjust the text size on my re-reader so much that now when I open up other docs it appears as though they are all large print, and that was just to make the print legible.

2-the chapters are all on some weird internal loop, at the end of each chapter I would have to physically go into the table of contents to move to the next one.

Ashley says

I think Carrie Brownstein of Sleater-Kinney worded it best, "Part manifesto, part how-to-guide...". I loved reading this book, it was like cliff notes stereo instructions for Derby. There are many reasons I would never try it, but being a really good skater I would probably be more prone to be a helper-outer of some kind. Reading "Down and Derby..." confirmed what I originally thought, though... there is no one wheel and one wheel out approach, it's all or nothing. Derby will be your life if you join... one day... even if it's just to cheer on some really kick ass ladies doing something, or roll around handing our flyers during bouts... this is a flavor of life I definitely want to taste one day!

Timothy says

Along with Frank Deford's *Five Strides On The Banked Track: The Life And Times Of The Roller Derby*, this is required reading for any aficionado of roller derby whether they be skater, fan, or any level of participant in between. Beginning with a solid snapshot of the historical version of the sport; this is a smartly written, in-depth history of the dawn days of the modern derby revival. While I long for a fully comprehensive history of this unique American institution—one that includes all competing entities from its Depression Era origins onward, as well as the variety of attempts to resuscitate the sports-entertainment version from its untimely death in the 1970's until its successful rebirth in Austin, Texas—*DOWN AND DERBY: THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO ROLLER DERBY* is as educational as it is entertaining, and perfectly captures the inspiring fledgling years of the modern roller derby revival. Much has changed since 2010, and much more will change in the years to come—and change for the better, if the passionate people who brought the sport this far continue to be involved—but *DOWN AND DERBY* is an unparalleled history of the era it covers.

