

# Roller derby teams promote their sport, make profits selling merchandise

By Dionne Obeso

How do you find the money to keep your roller derby team operating at peak levels? One way is to sell merchandise at roller derby events, and lots of derby teams are in on the action. Bev Roberts of the Black Hill BruiseHerz from Lead, S. D., works on promotion for her team, which is new to the game, and is already seeing the benefits.

"We are a newer team but have logo'd shirts out there and will be selling our merchandise at upcoming events. There is a great interest so we are hoping for a good outcome."

According to Jenny Broad (Dita Von Casualties) of the Oklahoma Victory Dolls, there is plenty to be optimistic about. "During our bouts we have excellent sales of t-shirts, stickers, drink cozies, and buttons that feature our logos and slogans. Everyone loves to support their home team!" They also encourage a share-and-share-alike mentality by inviting the competing teams to bring their own merchandise to the bouts as well. Even sales can be a competition with derby girls!

Most rinks do not require a share of the profits from merchandise sales, but derby girls looking to sell at their bouts should be aware that not everyone holds the same generous spirit. "Our main venue

is a skating rink that does not require us to share a portion of our merch profits, but our alternate venue is the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds who do require a percentage of merch sales," said Broad.

Skater Liz Dexic of the Mason-Dixon Roller Vixens (MDRVs) from Hagertown, Md. said that merch sales are amazing so far this year for their own team. "We currently sell men's and women's logo t-shirts, kid sized shirts, stickers, buttons, beer cozies, zippered pouches, and MDRV soap (made by our announcer). So far this season, our merchandise has sold incredibly well. We are only into our 3rd bout of the season, and are already on our 2nd order of merch from our printer."

In addition to selling items at the bout, some teams have set up online shops to sell to devoted fans, friends and family. Roberts (BruiseHerz) says that their shop should be up and running online by mid-summer, and the MDRV's sell through WickedSkatewear.com, but hope to eventually sell directly through their site. The Victory Dolls don't have an online store, but they do enjoy the extra exposure that they get through having a few of their items available for sale at a sponsor's boutique. "We only sell a few shirts through the bou-



A member of the South Dakota Black Hill BruiseHerz sells some team items at a Meet-n-Greet in Sturgis, SD in May, 2010.

tique, but we believe it is worth it to keep our merch there for the exposure that it brings to our league regardless of sales."

As roller derby gains in popularity, the girls enjoy the added benefits, including the boost to their ticket and merch sales. Money that they make selling their goods go into the purchase of more goods, and directly into the team for expenses like travel and rink fees, as well as other expenses like server fees for web sites.

Broad has also noticed the rise in derby popularity. "I do feel like roller derby is becoming more mainstream, but I know that it still has a long way to go. When our promotional street team hits up an event

with flyers to promote for our next bout, we have started to hear more responses like, 'Roller derby? Cool, I have a friend that plays in another city,' or 'Oh yeah, I just saw that movie 'Whip It!' with Ellen Page!'

"We're happy to hear those kinds of comments, but they still do not outnumber the people saying, 'I used to watch roller derby back in the '70's but didn't know that it existed anymore.'"

Not only are we working hard to promote our team's events, we're working just as hard to educate the public on the existence of roller derby in the 21st century as a real and highly competitive sport."

While some people are more interested in roller derby, and news has definitely been getting out, some girls still feel like they are playing an underground sport, and there are plenty of people out there who don't know what roller derby is. If your rink hosts a local team, it is of mutual benefit to educate the public about your local team and about roller derby in general; increased ticket sales at competitions can only be a good thing!

In the mean time, big name retailers

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