

Yes, I am a RollerGirl

I consider Nov. 29, 2007, the day I officially became a roller girl.

At that point, I had been skating with the CT RollerGirls, the state's all-female, flat track roller derby league, for only about six weeks. I was

just a rookie, or "fresh meat," as the members of the CT RollerGirls like to call new skaters.

I hadn't been formally inducted into the league yet — that would come later, at a ceremony at the Brass House bar on South Main Street

in Waterbury, when the league's veterans handed me a pink and purple certificate welcoming me to the league and then popped a balloon I was holding between my legs.

I hadn't been drafted to a team yet — that would also come later, one day when my league mates and I were stretching after practice and Tina Colada, the captain of the Iron Angels, suddenly announced that I had been drafted to the team. I sat there, slack-jawed, while my league mates cheered for me.

On Nov. 29, all I had was a pair of quad speed skates and my newly selected derby name — Beaver Knievel. And with a derby name, I felt that I was now a real, live roller girl.

I became intrigued with roller derby, a sport I didn't even know existed, in early October after spotting a stack of postcards at a local bagel joint advertising the CT RollerGirls' tryouts.

The postcard showed a girl on quad skates wearing a red dress printed with skeleton bones smashing into another skater. The requirements to become one of these hard-hitting roller girls, according to the post card, were: "21+, basic skating skills, and not afraid to fall and knock other chicks down."

I thought I could handle that, even though I hadn't put on a pair of roller skates since I was 12.

I peeked at the CT RollerGirls Web site, which says the league's mission is to run a financially sustainable, all-female flat track roller derby league that fosters community, sportswoman-ship and athleticism. The site said the CT RollerGirls wants strong, healthy women who are role models for girls of all ages.

Role models who skated fast and weren't afraid to hit their opponents hard, all while wearing fishnets and short skirts.

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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2008

GIRL: Like Knievel, without broken bones

Continued from 10D

mediately.

After tryouts on Oct. 15, I got a phone call from Pepper Grind-Her inviting me to start practicing with the league and I soon became a regular at the Roller Magic roller rink in Waterbury, skating there three or four nights a week. Once a week, I also skate at rinks in Wallingford or Middletown.

Although I'm not as raw as I was in November, I'm still a rookie. I'm still struggling to master the crucial roller derby skills that the more experienced skaters possess — keeping all eight wheels on the ground while whizzing around the track and maneuvering across the track quickly to block my opponents.

The months of practice have taught me that the glamorous aspects of roller derby — our derby alter egos, the sexy uniforms and fishnet stockings — do not make a roller girl. A real roller girl is made the hard way — by skating laps around the track while squatting until her

thighs and back throb in pain, and getting back up after a tough hit sends her skidding across the rink.

I chose Beaver Knievel as my derby name on Nov. 29, 2007, the day before my namesake, the motorcycle daredevil Evel Knievel, died at age 69. I love the idea of taking my name from a daredevil on wheels, but I hope I don't break as many bones as he did.

Like Evel Knievel, I use my wheels to propel myself to places I couldn't go to before. Knievel's motorcycle wheels took him to heights that earned him world records and fame.

My speed skates let me test the outer limits of my endurance and strength — that's why I became a roller girl.

Emily Beaver is a reporter for the Republican-American, covering Prospect and the Region 16 school district. Beaver Knievel's first bout with the Iron Angels is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Feb. 24 at the Roller Magic roller rink in Waterbury.