

That summer and fall, Bradley participated in workshops sponsored by the league to teach basic skills. She hoped to be selected in the January draft for the 2008 season but unfortunately was felled by a posterior cruciate ligament injury while training in October. Still wanting to be involved with the league, she became a referee and planned her playing debut for 2009.

Derby Details

The Rollergirls season lasts about six months, from February to August. The league consists of four "home" teams, which play each other in doubleheaders once a month, as well as an all-star team that takes on elite squads from other leagues around the country.

Bradley was drafted by the league's Denim Demons in January and played so well to start the season that she was also recruited for the all-star team in March.

"The all-star team plays sporadically," she noted. "There are months we have no games. But for example, over two consecutive weekends in mid-July, we played a total of three games."

So far, Bradley has traveled to Philadelphia and Alabama with the all-star team, which plays in tournaments all over the East Coast. The league handles traveling expenses for these road trips, although the competitors themselves are not paid. When the Denim Demons and all-star team are scheduled to face other teams in a doubleheader, Bradley competes in both bouts.

"There are paying spectators, but that gate money goes directly to the league," explained Bradley. "All of the players also pay dues and we hold fundraisers."

Time and Toughness

In addition to the financial commitment, players devote significant time to their sport.

"Throughout the year, we have four league practices a week that last two hours. Then during the season, each team has additional practices. It's actually like a part-time job. I put in about 20 hours a week, plus the 40 hours I work as a physical therapist."

All that practice time is necessary because roller derby is such a physically demanding sport. Five members of each team compete on an oval track and collisions are frequent. The Atlanta Rollergirls use a surface called sport court, but other playing surfaces include wood, tile and even concrete.

"One player from each team is called the 'jammer,'" Bradley said. "Everybody skates around the oval and if the jammer passes a member of the opposing team, it's worth a point. So her teammates try to clear a path by knocking members of the opposing team down, while those players try to knock her down so she cannot get past them."

Though physical contact is encouraged, some actions are prohibited.

"There's no tripping and you're not supposed to use elbows but that does happen. If the referee sees an infraction, she can call a pen-



alty. You cannot hit anybody above the shoulders or below the thighs. If you are coming up behind somebody, you have to get to the side of her or in front to make contact. You can use your own back to hit somebody, but you can't hit anybody in her back."

Playing Her Part

During the course of this season, Bradley has served as both a blocker and jammer.

"Everyone has their niche," she said. "A lot of the best players in the league are actually blockers. But jammers are usually the fastest skaters and have the best footwork to get around people." Asked to name her preference, she laughed. "I like blocking more because I get to hit people and knock them down. But jamming is fun sometimes too. It just requires a whole

lot of stamina."

Bradley's thirst for contact might be surprising considering her small stature – she stands just 5-foot-1. But the physical therapist said size is not a detriment. "It's actually an advantage because I have a lower center of gravity and can get more forceful hits."

What's In a Name?

Nicknames are a requirement for Rollergirls so when Bradley joined the league she wanted a moniker that captured her mean streak on the court.

"I'm a professional wrestling fan and Stone Cold Steve Austin is my favorite," she explained. "Something he always talked about was, 'Opening up a can of whoopass,' so I've had that name from the start."

Now coming to the end of her first season as a player, Bradley reflected on the experience.

"At times it's been overwhelming but also very exciting. I can't really explain. It's a lot of fun, very intense and time-consuming."

She also believes her roller derby experience has benefited her physical therapy career and vice versa. "It definitely helps to be active when you're a PT," she said. "And I usually dispense advice about injuries, aches and pains to teammates and even my opponents. Because we have a mentality that the whole league is a sisterhood. One of my league mates, Elle Beaux, said, 'On the court we're out for blood, off the court we're out for beers.' There is a lot of trash talking in roller derby, some fun and some not so fun. But pretty much everyone gets along very well."

Bradley has found physical therapy very fulfilling as well.

"I love it," she concluded. "There are some things I would change about being in acute care, but that goes with any job. I really enjoy my patients and coworkers. There is a lot of teamwork involved. Being a PT has measured up to everything I wanted. It's very rewarding and we have a really good time." ■

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