



## **L.A. Derby Dolls**

*By Andy Sternberg*

For some of us, an after-work jog or trip to the gym just isn't enough to release the day's pent up energy and aggression. A growing contingent of women are turning towards the re-emerging novelty sport of roller derby to get their kicks and bruises.

Puncharello is the captain of the L.A. Derby Dolls sires squad. She's one of over 80 Los Angeles women who lead relatively normal lives by day, and roll by night in the three-year-old roller derby club.

Puncharello is an eighth grade chemistry and physics teacher in Burbank. Her roller name comes from Erik Estrada's "Poncharello" character on the show C.H.I.P.S.

"I never thought I would be doing this," said Punchy, whose real name I promised not to use in this article. "When I read the ad on Craigslist, I was looking for hiking partners, and I saw an all-girl roller derby."

To her surprise, she met a bunch of regular women of all shapes and sizes. After months of intense practice, not only could they all skate like they never imagined, they became best friends.

So far, Puncharello's kept quiet about her second life as a Roller Derby girl, lest her students find photos of their role model science teacher in short skirts and fishnets on the Derby Dolls Web site.

"I'm kind of torn," she says, "because I think that Roller Derby is a great sport I think it's a great thing for kids to get involved in, for kids to see a bunch of empowered women and that any type of woman can do this sport and, just, succeed."

Puncharello readily admits, however, that it wouldn't hurt if they did know, at least in regards to classroom discipline.

Her teammates admire her but as one star siren, Letha Injection says, there's really no reason for anyone with the itch to skate to hold themselves back from their roller derby dreams.

"You should kick yourself in the face if you don't try," says Letha, relating her first skating experience to "7<sup>th</sup> grade / Junior High Makeout."

She says it doesn't take long to acclimate to roller derby. Beginners are thoroughly trained to be bout-ready in twice-weekly practices.

“I’d say that anywhere within three to six months you’re feeling amazing on skates and really into it and trying new stuff – especially at the rate that we practice,” Letha Injection says as she peels off her Velcro knee pads.

In addition to required practices two or three times per week, each Derby Doll pays \$80 a month towards team expenses, which include rent for a large, crowd-friendly practice space in a Little Tokyo mall.

“Eventually we won’t have to pay and maybe we’ll get compensated as well,” says Puncharello. “But we really don’t care about that now. We love this sport.

They certainly get their perks on game day, including live music and volunteer chiropractors on the sidelines. But the derby doll life style is a huge commitment.

“It’s 24/7 -- it consumes your life completely,” says Letha Injection. “If you’re a Derby Doll, you are a Derby Doll first, before anything else.”

Just don’t tell that to the principal at the middle school Puncharello teaches at.