

FLAT TRACK TOWN USA

THE SECOND ANNUAL BIG O INTERNATIONAL ROLLER DERBY TOURNAMENT ROLLS INTO EUGENE

BY ALEX NOTMAN



'I WOULDN'T RECOMMEND IT TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE,' SAYS LANE COUNTY CONCUSSION JAMMER JAMES BRAINS OF ROLLER DERBY
PHOTO BY ROB AND TRACY SYDOR ROBSYDOR.COM

It was bound to happen: A Eugene spoof of the zeitgeisty show *Portlandia*, called, of course, *Eugenia*. The viral video lays down the same beat-heavy opening music as its Portland inspiration with “Eugenia” spelled out in an identical gritty typeface in front of a city view of Spencer Butte, followed by downtown shots of the federal building, Voodoo Doughnuts, the bus station, Cowfish and finally City Hall.

Enter roller derby skaters Erin (Bullet) and James Brains and Mayor Kitty Piercy. Another parallel to the original TV show: Carrie Brownstein and Fred Armisen frequently call on Portland’s mayor for favors or support. In *Eugenia*, the Brains pay a visit to Piercy’s office to inform her about The Big O, the city’s second annual international roller derby tournament.

“We’re really excited to make Eugene ‘Flat Track Town USA,’” Bullet tells Piercy, followed by a daydreaming sequence where Piercy imagines herself in full roller derby gear (complete with a jersey that says “Mojo Mayor” on the back). The mayor responds, “I’m going to need a mouth guard.” The video concludes with a slogan: “Put a bruise on it!”

From May 17-19, Eugene will become “Flat Track Town USA” for the biggest international roller derby tournament that Lane County has seen yet. Co-hosted by the Emerald City Roller Girls (ECRG) and Lane County Concussion (LCC), the Roller Girls’ male counterpart, The Big O tournament will feature 21 women’s, men’s and juniors’ teams (ages 10-17) from around the West Coast, as well as three international teams from British Columbia, England and Australia. ECRG President Courtenay Padgett (Blue Ruin) expects a turnout of about 500 “hardcore” derby fans and over 1,000 locals at the Lane Event Center, a larger attendance than last year’s tournament at Willamalane which only had two sanctioned bout tracks versus this year’s three. The larger crowd will bring in nearly \$600,000 for the city, according to estimates from Travel Lane County’s Kayla Krempsey. And in typical Eugene (and *Portlandia*) fashion, The Big O is carving out its own distinctive niche by welcoming men’s and juniors’ teams (instead of just women’s teams) and making it a green event, in addition to intense physical and mental preparation.

THE CROSSOVER

In 2012, the men’s league competed in the first Big O, but this year the men of LCC are not only competing, they are cosponsoring the tournament with ECRG. James Brains, a jammer for LCC, explains that it was an intentional choice to show “that we support men’s roller derby.”

“Usually tournaments are men’s or women’s or juniors’,” adds Padgett, pointing out this year that the tournament will fully integrate the three leagues. “We decided to expand on that idea because it seemed unique. It made us different from other tournaments.”

“I think that’s one of the exciting aspects of this tournament is the juniors that are playing,” Kylie Belachaikovsky (Agent Orange) says. Belachaikovsky, who was voted favorite roller derby player in *EW*’s 2009-10 Best of Eugene, is competing as an all-star jammer in the women’s league and coaching the junior league. “Roller derby hasn’t been around very long and a lot of us came into roller derby with not a ton of previous athletic experience,” she says, “and now we have these juniors who have been playing derby for three, four and five years before they’re eligible to join an adult league and it’s exciting to see the incredible skill level that they’re bringing. A lot of them really have the potential to be elite athletes in the roller derby world.”

GREEN SANCTIONED

Big events can produce even bigger waste, and the local roller derby community wants to avoid that. The Big O has applied to be certified by the Council for Responsible Sport, an organization that supports sports organizers “who strive to produce socially and environmentally responsible events.” At press time, they were still waiting on confirmation.

“It’s a very green production,” Belachaikovsky says. “We have a lot of strong values as a league about the environmental impact of our sport. It’s kind of unique.” So how will this manifest at a roller derby tournament? The event is 100 percent powered by renewable energy and will use “eco-friendly” and compostable food containers and flatware, provide recycle, compost and water-filling stations (to discourage single-use water bottles), and SeSequential Biofuels will capture vendor grease to use in their biodiesel fuel.

But it’s not only a commitment to reducing waste, recycling and composting; there is a healthy, sustainable food component as well. “I’ve been to quite a few tournaments and usually there’s the usual food available — concession-type food,” Belachaikovsky notes. “We’re actually going to be offering the skaters very healthy vegetarian options, food that’s really for athletes and not nachos and hot dogs.”

THEY BE JAMMING AND PLANNING

Playing in a tournament requires a different approach than playing in a single bout; training and strategy are pushed to the limit. Many derby players used the Eugene Marathon as a training peg for The Big O, while others turn to long-