



Roller Derby Demographics: Results from the first-ever comprehensive Data collection on skaters and fans

Women's Flat Track Derby Association
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Methodology

Data for this survey were collected online during the month of February 2010. Participants (roller derby fans, skaters, and volunteers/affiliates) accessed the survey, through links provided through the WFTDA and its affiliate leagues' websites, social media (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter), email lists, and message boards. The final data set consisted of 9,781 respondents, with 50 percent of the sample consisting of fans and the other 50 percent consisting of skaters, volunteers, or other people involved with a roller derby league.

Fans

Basic demographics

Overall, most are female (59% to 41% male). Fans 24 years old and younger are more likely to be female (83% versus 17% male). As the ages of fans increase, the gender split decreases; starting at 35 years old and up, half of fans are female and half are male. Avid fans (those who have attended 3 or more bouts in the past year) are also evenly split between genders.

Ten percent of fans are 24 years old or younger. The coveted 25 and 34 year old demographic comprises 41 percent of fans. 35 to 54 year olds make up another 41 percent. Only 7 percent are 55 or older. The average fan is just over 36 years old.

Four out of five fans identify as straight; the remaining identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or other.

Thirty-seven percent of fans are single and 37 percent are married. Sixteen percent live with a partner and eight percent are divorced or separated. Less than one percent are widowed.

Roughly a quarter of fans (24%) live with children under 18 in their household.

Sixty-one percent of fans have at least some college education; 34 percent have earned a degree. Thirty percent have attended graduate school and 21 percent have a graduate degree.

Attracting fans

Derby is still very much a grassroots sport in terms of attracting new fans. Word of mouth is responsible for attracting the majority of fans, either by having a friend or family member involved (34%) or hearing about it through a friend (23%). Print advertisements bring in ten percent of fans, but radio or TV advertisements are responsible for less than 2 percent. Only 7 percent of fans report hearing about roller derby through national or local press coverage.

The recent attention through “Whip It!”, “Hell on Wheels” and/or the A&E show “Rollergirls” was responsible for only 4 percent of fans hearing about derby, but it was just as effective as word of mouth for fans under 18 (15% for both methods). Ten percent of fans between 18 and 24 cited this as the way they first heard about derby. Exposure through TV shows and movies may be a way to reach the next generation of derby fans.

Sponsor interest

Derby fans have spending power. Nearly a third (31%) of fans, have a household income of at least \$75,000 per year. Avid fans earn an average household income of just over \$65,000 per year and report spending an average of \$323 on derby in the past year. Ninety-six percent of all fans agree that derby bouts provide good entertainment value for their money.

Businesses would be smart to get the attention of derby fans by sponsoring a league. Two thirds of all fans know the businesses that support their local derby league, and nearly 90 percent hold a favorable opinion of these businesses. Over 60 percent have patronized businesses that sponsor their local league. Hardcore derby fans make even more of an effort to support sponsoring businesses—84 percent know who the sponsors are and almost 80 percent have patronized those businesses.

Sports interest

Derby fans have been stereotyped as people who don't like other sports. The survey results reveal that this does not apply to every derby fan—Almost 60 percent of fans consider themselves a fan of traditional major sports such as football, baseball or basketball. Fifty-five percent attended a sporting event other than derby at least twice in 2009. This also means, however, that 40 percent of fans are an untapped audience in terms of sports marketing. This group forms a new target for sponsors of other sports that are considering sponsoring derby. Given the profile of the average derby fan, this is an audience that potential sponsors want.

Derby fans keep up with sports through several channels. Seventy percent watch sports or sports-related programming on TV. Over half (54%) keep up with sports by visiting websites, and just over a third (35%) listen to sports-related programming on the radio.

If national tournament-level roller derby bouts were broadcast on TV, 93 percent of all derby fans say they would be at least somewhat likely to tune in if their favorite team were playing. Eighty percent would still be likely to tune in even if their teams weren't playing.

Skaters

Basic demographics

Even with the emergence of male roller derby leagues, women make up 98 percent of active adult derby skaters. However, men are more than 60 percent of league volunteers (including referees).

The majority (63%) of skaters are between the ages of 25 and 34. Out of the skaters who responded to the survey, the average age is nearly 31 years old. Twenty-eight percent of skaters are older than 35.

Seventy-six percent of skaters identify as straight; the remaining 24 percent identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other.

One-third of skaters are single, slightly more (36%) are married, and almost a quarter (24%), live with a partner. Seven percent are divorced or separated.

Thirty-one percent of skaters live with children under 18 in their household.

A quarter of skaters have at least some college education and 37 percent have earned a college degree. Ten percent have some graduate education, and almost twenty percent have a graduate level degree.

Attracting new skaters

Almost half (48%) skaters first heard of the modern roller derby revival through a friend or someone they knew who was involved. Twelve percent saw a print advertisement. Eight percent of current skaters saw links or stories on the internet and a similar percentage met skaters at an event. As with fans, grassroots methods shoulder the most responsibility for spreading the word about derby.

Level of involvement

Seventy-one percent of current skaters attended four or more bouts in the past year, and 98 percent of skaters plan to attend 3 or more bouts in the coming year. Almost three-quarters have taken at least one road trip to another city for a roller derby event, with the road-trippers averaging 5 trips in the last year.

Almost 60 percent of skaters say that it's important to them that a bout they are considering seeing is a WFTDA bout. Even if it is not a formally sanctioned event, 93 percent say that it's important to them that derby bouts are played under a nationally agreed upon set of rules such as the WFTDA ruleset.

Current skaters show a greater support for men's roller derby than those not involved in the sport. Thirty-eight percent of skaters support men's roller derby at least on an equal level as women's derby, significantly more than the 21 percent of fans who support men's derby.

Only 5 percent of skaters agree that they would enjoy derby more if skaters used their real names.

Sixty percent of skaters report having spent over \$500 on derby in the past year. The average skater spent \$966.74 on roller derby last year.

Almost all skaters (99%) say they would likely tune into a television broadcast of national tournament action if their league were involved. Even if their league weren't involved, 98 percent of skaters would be likely to watch.

If a high-quality roller derby video game were available on only one gaming platform, 72 percent of skaters would at least consider buying that gaming system in order to play the game.

Hobbies

Contrary to the idea of derby being the only thing they are involved in, skaters have diverse interests. Overall, however, most of these pursuits are on the quieter side compared to derby—the top 5 are reading (55%), cooking (43%), music performance (40%), walking/hiking and camping (tied for 4th at 39%), and yoga and crafting tie for fifth place at 37 percent each. The punk rock/DIY ethic extends to other parts of skaters' lives beyond derby.

Seventy-two percent of skaters own either a handheld or console gaming system.

Skaters average 3.68 hours a day on the internet. Sixty-one percent of skaters report that they usually spend 3 hours or more a day online.

Fifty-four percent of skaters consider themselves a fan of traditional major sports such as football, baseball, hockey, basketball or soccer.

About the WFTDA

The Women's Flat Track Derby Association is the governing body for women's flat track roller derby, and a membership organization for the leagues to collaborate and network. The organization created and maintained the first standardized rule set for the flat track game, which is now in its fourth edition. The WFTDA also serves as the sanctioning body for flat track roller derby games, hosts regional and national tournaments, sets safety standards, provides insurance to athletes and leagues, and serves as a networking venue for flat track roller derby leagues to share resources and get advice. There are currently 78 WFTDA member leagues.