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# ROLLER DERBY’S THEIR JAM



PHOTOS BY STEVEN VALENTI REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Lisa Brenton, of Waterbury, with Constitution State Junior Roller Derby teaches girls from Save Girls on FYER how to stretch before skating at Roller Magic in Waterbury Thursday.

## Junior league hopes to expose inner city girls to rockin’ sport



MIKE PATRICK  
CITY BEAT

**K** WATERBURY aliyah Kee is 9 years old and already knows how to roller skate. She doesn’t, however, know how to hit other skaters while doing it.

She’s learning now.

A grant-funded partnership between the city-based Save Girls on FYER and the Constitution State Junior Roller Derby is designed to introduce the expensive, aggressive and white-dominated sport to inner city minority girls between the ages of 7 and 17.



Malaysia Wynter, 8, of Waterbury stretches with the group.

“It’s really to expose girls to a sport that’s not really diverse, and expose them to something unique they’ve not been involved in,” said Jacquee Porter, founder of

Save Girls on FYER, which provides education and empowerment programs for inner city girls. “We decided that it will be a great opportunity to partner with (Con-

stitution State Junior Roller Derby), to expose the girls of color to this sport that lacks diversity.”

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# DERBY: Girls build strength and character

One of the founders of the junior roller derby said the girls will not only develop physical strength, but strength of character.

"Roller derby teaches self-confidence," said Meredith Zolty, who is also secretary of the roller derby. "It teaches you to love your body for what it can do and not just for what it looks like. It teaches teamwork and it gives girls a unique sense of community with each other."

This program, which takes place Thursdays at Roller Magic, also helps train the next generation of players, she said.

"The sport of roller derby is a notoriously monochromatic sport; there's a serious problem throughout the sport that it tends to skew pretty white," Zolty said. "We're looking at the future of the sport, and these kids are the future of the sport. If we can get more people of color in as kids, the sport will be better off in the long run."

The primary intention, organizers said, is that the girls will be better off in the long run.

"I believe it will empower them, because for one, they're taking on a new challenge, something that's totally unknown, something they'll have to be taught step by step," Porter said. "Learning a new skill is also very empowering, learning how to roller skate and balance. And it's also a great physical sport, so it helps them in that aspect as well."

There are many team contact sports that allow boys to work out their aggression and develop confidence and cooperative skills, but few for girls, Porter said.

"This definitely can be an outlet that can release some stress," she said. "It's a positive way of navigating through the stresses and challenges of their daily life."

Zolty agreed.

"I've been involved with roller derby for nine years now, and it has definitely



STEVEN VALENTI REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

**From left, Seana Hunter helps her daughter, Sernity Samolis, 13, of Waterbury, get ready for training with the Constitution State Junior Women's Roller Derby at Roller Magic in Waterbury Thursday.**

helped me to sort out my own personal demons, my own aggressions," she said. "Pretty much every adult I know who's involved in the sport says, 'I wish this was around when I was a kid, because it would have kept me out of trouble.' Having a positive place to put your energies is fantastic."

Zolty said another barrier youngsters have to overcome is the high cost of all the safety equipment required. The eight-week Waterbury program is supported by a \$5,000 Sports 4 Life grant from the Women's Sports Foundation. The foundation's goal is to increase girls' access to sports to help them develop leadership skills, self-esteem, confidence and perseverance.

Kalayah Kee and her seven-year-old sister, Tayonna

Kee, already have those qualities, according to their

mother, Meka Flowers.

"I actually put them in there to see if it would tone their aggression," she said. "My girls are very aggressive. They're very outspoken and they're very confident ... They're not weak individuals; they're definitely strong individuals."

Kalayah Kee said she's excited to participate in the sport.

"If I want to play as a professional; I will already know how to do it," she said.

Tayonna Kee was then asked how the boys she knows might react if they knew she was a roller derby player. "I don't know," she said. "Maybe they'd be scared of me."

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