

The True Voice of Derby

by Matilda the Hun, RCRG, DLF

"It's great that derby announcers as a whole have combined true sports play by play with color and enthusiastic over the top announcing from action sports and wrestling, then mix in a little pop culture humor and the derby call chemistry is complete."

- Chip Queso, TXRG announcer

Roller derby announcers have the interesting perspective of being on the outside looking in, and in some ways, they know us better than we skaters know ourselves. With our constant training and league business, we don't always get to appreciate the work our announcers do. However, we don't have to stop skating to know how lucky we are to have them representing us, as well as educating and entertaining our fans, even though some announcers refuse to see themselves as more as supplemental.

"I am a voice on a microphone and if no one really notices me then I'm doing my job right. The ladies competing are the attraction, not me. I'm just a guy who keeps newbs aware of what's going on, the sponsors happy by mentioning them, and the fans aware of where the after party is."

-Corndog, Gotham announcer

As nice as that sentiment is, we find announcing fills very important roles - keeping the crowds entertained and informed. Standout announcers from across the country fill their roles with panache and style.

The original big cheese of derby announcers, Chip Queso of Texas Rollergirls, says he was lured in 6 years before by Buckshot Betsy and Sparkle Plenty after they heard him announce for a skateboard contest.

Dumptruck, hailing from Colorado and built like the Rocky Mountains themselves, has a distinctive style as free and unconventional as the West once was. Dumptruck sometimes travels southwest to lend his voice to the Albuquerque derby squad as "Duke Truck."

Rat City's Randy Pan the Goatboy is a musician, theater buff, and comedian as well as a hyperactive announcer extraordinaire who can really get the crowd going with his killer dance moves and running high-five. He has been involved with Rat City since the beginning and has traveled from Tacoma, to Olympia, to Texas for derby.

Windy City's Bryant Mumble was a professional baseball mascot in Ohio for 5 years before moving to Chicago and putting his hat in WCR's ring. Mumble and his cohort Mouthpiece auditioned together and have been announcing since 2005; Bryant Mumble

has called every home game in WCR's history (as well as a lot of away games, too). He recalls the early days, "when we had wrestlers teach the skaters how to "fight." I also remember when the skaters realized a "fight" might actually cost them the game and they didn't want to do it anymore."

Professor Jake Stratton, also from Seattle, is a member of the literacy-promoting hardcore band Bloodhaag, and also announces for local wrestling matches, burlesque nights, and game shows.

Corndog, Gotham announcer, and fan of competitive eating, had started out filming a documentary on the New York girls, when he realized the films-about-derby market had been oversaturated and he switched to announcing. (Never fear, his movie is only temporarily shelved, and he has plans on following up with skaters after they've retired.)

Ozzy Zion, aka Rabbi Ozzy Zion Esq, of TXRG started watching co-ed banked track roller derby on Saturday mornings, right after American Gladiators. Years later, he attended a KCRW game and his original love of derby came flooding back. While he does not practice announcing in front of a mirror, he does stretch out and do some high-kicks before each game. "I don't think announcers should be able to say 'LEAD JAMMER' in unison more than one time per bout," Zion says, "if they do, they have to buy me a shot of whiskey."

*"I love Randy Pan...if you listen closely he might be giving tips..."
-Drew Blood, RCRG*

It may seem that being an announcer means membership in an all-boys club, there are some very standout female announcers. The reason there are fewer gals at the mike is simple: those who can, skate. Rat City's sideline announcer Queen Mum, when asked if she wished she could play, responded, "I am a pretty good skater and often wished that I had a better medical plan that would enable me to compete. God knows I've fantasized about what my skater name would be- the best ones are not quite fit to print."

Philly's Hymen Heaven, spent her first season pregnant; she was "waddling around the track" up until ten days before the birth of her son. The ladies of announcing feel anything but out of place – according to Hymen, "the other announcers are like brethren and sistereen. We're like a cult perhaps. Chip Queso, from the minute I met him was nothing but encouraging, and Dirty Marty from Charm City is like the unsung hero of Roller Derby. He's so much fun he makes you forget how well he knows the sport. Plus he's got his own theme song!" When asked about other sports she's into, Hymen replied, "I also love watching golf because I think Johnny Miller is really mean on the mic."

Derby's announcers have created family of their own, with their own web site, "Voices of Reason." Which is where, according to Chip Queso, they discuss all topics derby production, talk about how to evolve as the sport evolves, and, of course, bash on each others moms. Most announcers feel the derby community is akin to an extended family,

"My very first bout I got to call with [Texas'] Chip Queso and Tank from Ohio Roller Girls. It was like someone had asked me to valet and my very first car was a Rolls Royce Phantom. Man, those guys were fantastic"

~Hymen Heaven, Philly announcer

"Derby has given me the best reason ever to travel and meet new people," says Texas' Chip Queso, "we almost never have to get a hotel even when we don't know a soul in town. Just send a note on Myspace and we will have couches to crash and beers a plenty."

After giving props to his fellow announcers, Gotham's Corndog said, "the class of ladies and gentleman who hold the microphone is on such a high level. We have a fairly thankless job, and those of us who work to keep our facts straight, I trust with my life (but not my sister, you understand)."