

# Love What You Love Podcast

## Episode 32: Roller Derby with Amanda Dela Cruz

### January 26, 2021

Welcome to *Love What You Love*; I'm Julie Rose. I'm insatiably curious about people and the world around us, and I'm absolutely in love with passion and unselfconscious enthusiasm. Every other week I geek out with someone about the thing that they love, and then I share it with you.

Hello, hello! We are back! It's awesome to be back here with you again. We had an extra week's delay, thanks to some health issues I experienced out of the blue. Happy to say I'm doing much, much better, and I'm super ready to get back to this love and this joy.

The overall break made me realize that I need to go back to an every other week schedule though, much as it pains me to do it. I loved putting episodes out every week, but on top of a full-time job it was becoming more of a grind and less of a joy, and you know I'm about finding the joy. So, starting with this episode, we're back to every other week. If circumstances change, we'll definitely go back to weekly.

Let's meet this week's guest. I have been dying to get this person on the show for over a year. With the pandemic and her cross-country move, we didn't have a chance to chat. But I'm so glad we finally did because this was fascinating.

Amanda Dela Cruz is a full-time stay-at-home mom to two young kids, and she is absolutely passionate about roller derby. In this chat, we talk inclusivity, spectacular bruises, personal transformation, heartbreak, the Olympics, perseverance, alter egos, and so much more. She's so passionate and thoughtful. You are going to love this conversation. So find out why Amanda loves roller derby and why you might learn to love it too.

---

**Julie:** Hello, Amanda! Thank you so much for joining me today!

**Amanda:** Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to talk to you.

**Julie:** I'm excited because I don't know *anything* about roller derby. I want to understand... maybe for folks who don't really know what derby is, can you give us a high-level overview of, like, what is roller derby?

**Amanda:** So, roller derby is a full-contact sport. It's played on quad roller skates. Each match is made up of two teams of five players. Four players on each team are defensive and offensive players combined and they're called blockers. One player on each team is the jammer. Jammers score points by lapping the blockers on the opposing team.

I play flat track roller derby, so most people's public perception of roller derby is something called banked roller derby, where you have the sloped track, which sort of like levels out in the center and goes up on the sides. That is the type of roller derby they play in the movie *Whip It*, which I imagine is most people's understanding of modern roller derby. I play flat track roller derby, which is where you skate around a taped-off track on flat ground.

That's the most popular form of roller derby that's played, flat track, mostly because it's way more accessible than banked track roller derby. Banked track roller derby involves a heavy investment in, like, infrastructure, basically. You have to have a banked track.

You have to have somewhere to keep it. You have to have a way to move it around to go to bouts.

**Julie:** They're not called races? They're called a bout?

**Amanda:** Yeah, the term you'll most likely hear is a bout, or some people just call it a game or a match.

**Julie:** Okay, a match. Got it.

**Amanda:** In its inception in, like, the early 2000s, it's most usually called a roller derby bout.

**Julie:** Okay, and is that, kind of, a boxing reference because you're so full-body contact?

**Amanda:** I actually don't know why that's the preferred term. I don't know. You'll hear it called anything from, like I said, a bout, or a game, or a match.

**Julie:** When you say that it's full contact, what do you mean?

**Amanda:** Public perception of roller derby kind of harkens back to its more theatrical, like, WWE-type version that I think was popularized in, like, the '70s with elbows, and flipping people over the barrier... That is not the level of full contact we play, at least I play. There's a small subset of people who play what I refer to as renegade roller derby, where it's like, no rules.

But the roller derby that I play is full contact meaning within the legal contact zones. You can hit, and push, and brace against your opponents with almost your entire body. There are no elbows. You can't elbow somebody. You can't hit someone below the knees or above the neck. You can hit someone down the center of their back within two inches on either side of their spine. There are rules in place to protect people's safety, but other than that, it's... you know.

**Julie:** And do you wear helmets? Do you wear elbow pads? What's the gear?

**Amanda:** The full protective gear that's required is helmet, mouthguard, wrist guard, elbow pads, knee pads.

**Julie:** And so the goal is... The reason that you're getting full body contact while you're going around the ring is that you've got the person who's trying to lap the other team, and that's how your team scores points.

**Amanda:** Yeah. The jammer, which is indicated on the track by... they will have a cover on their helmet that has a star on it. The jammer has to get through the pack of blockers... It's called the pack, which is the combined members of both teams. The eight players who are blockers will be on the track in front of the two jammers. The start whistle goes, and the two jammers from each team try to make their way through the pack. The reason I say the blockers play both offensively and defensively is because simultaneously you're trying to prevent the opposing team's jammer from passing you and also help your jammer get past the opposing team's blockers.

**Julie:** Is it like in a series of periods, or like one race at a time? And how long does it take?

**Amanda:** There are two halves in each roller derby bout. Two 30-minute halves.

**Julie:** 30 minutes?! Holy cow! Do you have substitutions? Or do you play the whole time?

**Amanda:** [laughs] Oh, no. It's being subbed constantly.

**Julie:** Oh, okay! [laughs]

**Amanda:** So, within each half there are what's called a jam. Each jam can be up to two minutes long. So, within the 30-minute half you're not playing for more than two minutes at a time.

**Julie:** Oh, okay. That's a lot of energy.

**Amanda:** Playing for two minutes, let me be clear, is exhausting.

**Julie:** [laughs]

**Amanda:** Most jams are not a full two minutes because whichever jammer breaks away from the pack of blockers first is given the indication of being the lead jammer, and they have the power to end gameplay for that jam at any time. So, if the jammer on my team breaks through, and then the opposing team's jammer is right behind them, they can strategically end the gameplay before the other team is able to score any points.

**Julie:** How many points are often, like, scored during a bout?

**Amanda:** The point scoring system in roller derby is a little complicated, and I think that's why most people tend to get tripped up in the understanding of the gameplay. So, points are able to be scored only by the jammers, and only after what is called your initial pass. So, when the gameplay whistle starts and the jammers break through the pack of blockers, that is not a point-scoring opportunity for them. That is breaking out of your initial pass. Once the jammer comes around the track again for, technically, their second pass through the blockers, then they are able to start scoring points.

**Julie:** Okay, so if they can get through the pack again, then that's a point.

**Amanda:** Mm-hmm. In the current iteration of the rules, the jammer can score one point for each blocker's hips of the opposing team that they pass. And that sounds like very particular language, and it is. The reason it's 'passing the hips' is because you can use your entire body to prevent the jammer from passing you, and so the jammer only scores your point once they have disengaged from you as a player.

**Julie:** Do you play jammer or do you play blocker?

**Amanda:** I play both, but my preference is to jam.

**Julie:** And what is the most spectacular bruise you've ever gotten from a game?

**Amanda:** [laughs] Oh my gosh. I have gotten so many, it's hard to count. I think that the most spectacular bruise I've ever gotten was actually self-inflicted when I sat down on... [laughs] I basically sat down on my own skate and had a bruise exactly, like, in my butt crack. It was enormous, and it was agonizing.

**Julie:** [laughs] You poor thing.

**Amanda:** I basically impaled myself on my own skate. [laughs]

**Julie:** [laughs] Oh no.

**Amanda:** Which is very common.

**Julie:** Like on the track, or like on the side?

**Amanda:** Yeah, no, that was on the track.

**Julie:** So they take you out, obviously, and...

**Amanda:** Oh no. Not at all.

**Julie:** WHAT? Really?

**Amanda:** No way. [laughs] I got back up and I played the next jam.

**Julie:** Oh my god. You're a badass!

**Amanda:** Honestly, when you're in it, you kind of don't even feel it until later. I've known people who've played through broken noses, broken fingers... It's not uncommon for people to play through minor injuries.

**Julie:** Is it co-ed, or it is, like, only female-identifying people? How does that work?

**Amanda:** The body of roller derby that I play in is called the Women's Flat Track Derby Association. There are co-ed leagues; there are co-ed organizations. The Men's Roller Derby Association actually has, like, fewer gender restrictions than the women's.

The gender issue is actually really interesting in roller derby, and one of the reasons that I really love the sport and love playing in this organization is because the gender, I guess, requirements, are way more expansive than any other, like, professional sport. So, it's called the Women's Flat Track Derby Association. Basically, their gender policy is anyone who identifies as transgender women, intersex women, or gender expansive. So essentially, if you identify as a cis female, or a trans woman, or a non-binary person, you are eligible to play in the WFTDA.

**Julie:** That's a national organization?

**Amanda:** That's an international organization. That's the largest body of roller derby. There are hundreds of thousands of roller derby players across the globe, and this policy... You know, like any organization, it's not perfect and there's been issues that they've tried to work through when it comes to gender and gender inclusivity, but I have always felt like the upfront and intentional inclusion of trans folks in the sport has been one of the best parts of playing roller derby.

**Julie:** Being in an organization that you know is inclusive.

**Amanda:** Yeah, and I've played... I play derby with trans folks all the time and it's really great. It's great to play with folks who wouldn't get a chance to play a sport that they love, maybe, in another venue because of their gender identity. It's been really wonderful to be able to play with people who can be their authentic selves and be kick-ass athletes. And they are kick-ass, for sure.

**Julie:** What prompted you to join a roller derby league? Had you always wanted to do it? Did you roller skate as a child? What prompted you, and what drew you to it initially?

**Amanda:** I roller skated a little as a child, I think in the same way that most people my age did. Like, once or twice at the roller rink for a birthday party. I knew how to skate on quad skates, it wasn't completely foreign, but I hadn't done it in many years.

I first heard about roller derby in its modern incarnation... I think it was 2009 when a friend of mine took me to a bout in central New Jersey. And immediately I was like, "I love this! This is everything I want." And I went to a bunch more bouts that year. I got married in the summer of 2010 and my bachelorette party, we went to a roller derby match.

**Julie:** That's awesome!

**Amanda:** Yeah, it was great. In Asbury Park in New Jersey in 2010. It was fantastic. And then I, kind of, didn't think about it for many years. I got married, my husband went to grad

school, we had kids, I became a stay-at-home parent, and I never really seriously thought about playing myself in those early days. But as time went on and my kids got older, you know, I kind of fell into that very classic stay-at-home mom situation where I looked around and realized that everything I did every day was for other people. [laughs] And I didn't have anything for myself, and I was feeling a little... I was not unhappy with my choices or my life, but I just really was feeling like I needed something to do, something for myself.

And I remembered roller derby and that I loved it. I searched online and on YouTube for some videos about it, and what it looked like today, late 2017. So, in the fall of 2017 I decided to look, and I was like, "I wonder if New York City - which is where I was living at the time - has roller derby." Which is hysterical to me now because New York City's roller derby team... I mean, they're currently ranked number two in the world and at the top. The league is called Gotham Roller Derby. They've been at the forefront of roller derby for 15 years and I've been really lucky to be a part of the league. It's hysterical to me now that I had the thought, "I wonder if New York City has roller derby."

**Julie:** Little did you know.

**Amanda:** Little did I know I was in, basically, the epicenter of roller derby. The biggest roller derby hotspots in the United States are, probably, New York, and Texas, and Portland, Oregon, where I live now.

**Julie:** Texas? Really? Oh, and Portland too?

**Amanda:** Oh yeah, Portland's team is currently number one and has been for quite a few years.

**Julie:** What! That's why you decided to move there. Don't lie. [laughs]

**Amanda:** It wasn't *not* the reason. The proximity to derby was absolutely a high priority.

**Julie:** You said when you first went to see a bout, you said, "This was everything I ever wanted." What did you mean by that?

**Amanda:** I had been a bit of a jock in my youth. When I was a child I played sports, I loved moving my body, I loved physical exertion. And then as I came into middle and high school, that kind of fell away. I started doing theater, I started studying literature, which are kind of like indoor kid activities. And also I was never very good at any of the sports that I tried. [laughs] I was always, like, fine. I was never the worst, but I definitely never excelled. For me, growing up... I've always been a bit of a perfectionist, so doing something that I wasn't immediately very good at was something that, as I got older it fell away.

It wasn't until my early 30s when I started thinking about doing roller derby when I, you know, started thinking about athletic pursuits. I was 32 when I went to my first training session with Gotham. I had not put roller skates on my feet for, probably, 20 years. [laughs]

**Julie:** Wow!

**Amanda:** And I was not in any kind of, like, peak physical condition, aside from the general fitness of having two kids under five gives you. I was not, like, an active person. So yeah, I started training with Gotham.

**Julie:** Is it, like, a minor league program where they get you trained up? Are there different leagues? Levels? How did that work? You say you started training with them. What was that process?

**Amanda:** So, every league has their own structure when it comes to that kind of stuff. Some people will give you a very brief training and then throw you right into their development team. Because Gotham is a very large and very established league, they have particular structures for training, and development, and certifying people to play.

I started in what they call their basic training program, which is basically ten-week sessions and three levels. So in level one you're learning basics of skating, basics of... basically the minimum skills you need in order to safely play roller derby. So we learned a lot about balancing on one leg, how to stop safely, how to skate forwards and backwards, how to skate within the track lines because you're not allowed to go out of bounds in gameplay. Mostly things to make sure you can be a safe player for yourself and the other folks on the track.

The second level you're learning the beginning elements of gameplay, enhancing your minimum skills, and you start doing what they call contact, where you start doing partnered drills to learn how to play roller derby. And then the third level is basically where you're learning more advanced strategy. You're scrimmaging and you're doing the full contact.

Then they have try-outs once a year for their home, travel, and development teams. Basically, the development team means you have passed on your minimum skills, you have been accepted into the league as a skater, and you're learning and growing as a player.

**Julie:** Did you start on the development team or did you try out and get on to one of the home teams?

**Amanda:** For the past two years... Well, 2018, 2019, and the first three months of 2020 I was in the basic training program. In the fall of 2019 I did try out for the league. I made it to the last, like, level of tryouts but I was ultimately cut. So, I have never been a, like, registered skater with the league. In early 2020 I started officiating with them. Because derby is entirely volunteer run, every part of roller derby, even at the highest levels is volunteer. There is no such thing as being a professional roller derby player. We don't get paid. I mean, there are sponsorships. Lots of people cobble together and come through sponsorships, and teaching, and training camps, and things like that. But there is no professional roller derby.

So yeah, the games that I've played in have been unofficial scrimmages, but I still feel like I've learned a lot, especially since I was older when I started. I was not coming from a background of sports. A lot of people who play come from a background of sports. A lot of people come from a background of ice skating, of hockey, so they have those fundamentals already in play. And I was basically starting from nothing.

**Julie:** That's some serious determination, you know, to decide you're going to do it, go through this program, be involved in these scrimmage matches. That's a lot. That takes a lot of guts and it takes a lot of determination.

**Amanda:** You know, the process of starting, and learning, and becoming an athlete was really transformative for me. It was really life changing, both in the sense that I was doing something for myself for the first time in many years. I was doing something that had

nothing to do with my family, nothing to do with my kids, that they really had no part in aside from encouraging me and supporting me. I was able to find community at a time when I was really isolated and lonely. And it also really forced me to confront parts of myself that I had never been forced to confront before, which was...

**Julie:** Like?

**Amanda:** I think, primarily, was the perfectionism. I would never have called myself a perfectionist before. I kind of had, like, a '0 or 100' mentality about things. Like I said previously, if I wasn't good at something right away I didn't do it. So, my experience with being bad at things and getting better was so limited. I had no experience with it. I had no experience with totally sucking at something and continuing to do it anyway. So that was, like, a real moment of growth for me because I was so bad at it when I first started. [laughs]

Like I said, I had not put roller skates on for 20 years. I was not in the physical condition that you really need to be to play in roller derby, and I was bad. I fell constantly. There were skills I couldn't grasp for a long, long time. I constantly felt embarrassed.

**Julie:** Like somehow you weren't perfect at it right out of the gate, so that's embarrassing?

**Amanda:** Oh my god, yeah. And having to confront that, but also having this underlying... I loved it so much that I could not bring myself to stop doing it. There were times when I left the classes crying because I was so upset with myself for how poorly I was doing, and I never stopped going. I just kept coming back because I wanted to do it so badly, and I wanted to get better, and I wanted to play.

**Julie:** Overcoming that frustration, and the self-doubt, and all that because you loved it so much, what is it about it that you love so much?

**Amanda:** It's really hard to put into words. Over the course of, like, becoming a derby athlete, I really have realized, like, how much I love sports. Let me be clear, I don't love *all* sports. I could not care less about football or baseball, and I don't want to watch men playing any sport ever for any reason. [laughs] It's boring to me.

But I love sports, I love being active. I love my body learning to do things and using it in ways to accomplish goals. So that element... I really learned that I love that. It helped me manage lots of parts of my life that I thought were unmanageable. It's helped with my anxiety, it helps with my mood, it helps with so many parts of my life that I thought, "This is just the way I am." But like, exercise, and physical activity, and sports has helped me manage those things.

**Julie:** So it's been transformative on a lot of different levels.

**Amanda:** Yeah, and I think specifically with roller derby, the culture of it is one of the biggest parts that I love. Like I said, its gender inclusivity is awesome, and I think that other sports have a lot to learn from roller derby when it comes to that. Roller derby is very queer, so lots of diversity in terms of sexuality and gender identities.

Like all American institutions, roller derby has work to do when it comes to race and racial diversity, but I also think that it's much more willing to look those things in the eye than a lot of organizations. It hasn't been perfect in the past and it's not perfect now, but there is a culture of repentance and trying to do right by folks that it hasn't done right by in the past. I mean, again, like a lot of American institutions, roller derby

is very white, and the WFTDA and most leagues that I've interacted with are very dedicated to addressing and correcting those issues.

And I just like hitting people with my body. [laughs] It sounds very base, but I get a lot of pleasure and satisfaction from it. I like pushing people around. I like knocking people to the floor. I've said that I really like to jam, and I love that, like, rush of success when I have barreled everyone in my way out of my way. It is great. It is a great feeling.

And since I haven't been playing roller derby for so long, you know, I think my poor husband has felt the brunt of it. I'll, like, push him into the walls a little bit in a gentle way, or I'll pretend to punch him in the shoulder, which he does not appreciate in any way. My poor, sweet, pacifist husband is like, "Please... when is roller derby starting again? God!" I wrestle with my five-year-old son all the time, and my eight-year-old daughter and my husband both look on in, like, just confusion and horror. [laughs]

**Julie:** [laughs] Oh, that's so funny. And it's such... I mean, it's got to be so frustrating not being able to... like you were just starting to really get your groove and then 2020 happened.

**Amanda:** Yeah, it was really heartbreaking. It's been a really hard year for roller derby. I will say that one of the best parts of being involved in roller derby is that the WFTDA's response and path forward to Covid is incredible. They take it very seriously. The Covid response plan and the return-to-gameplay plan they've developed is based in science. It's based on safety for every skater and the larger community.

There was a lot of media coverage about the WFTDA's return-to-play plan and the structure of it. I know Samantha Bee did a segment on it where she spoke to some of the folks in leadership who developed the plan. So that's been really great. Again, another reason why I love being in roller derby. They know that, like, playing a sport is not as important as, like, people's lives.

For each league, it has been financially devastating this year. Every individual league has suffered and struggled financially this year because so much of the money that it takes to run the league... Every league is a nonprofit. The bulk of their profits come from games, which have not happened in the United States at all since March. It's been a real struggle. But the overarching leadership knows that that's necessary. It's a necessary sacrifice to keep people safe. But it's been an incredible struggle. Like I said, financially, every league in the world is struggling.

**Julie:** And how are you dealing with it yourself?

**Amanda:** Oh, it's awful. It's horrible. Like you said, I was really starting to come into my own in the beginning of 2020. I had not made the... I call it 'being drafted' into the league. I had not been drafted for that season but everyone I spoke to was really confident that I was on a path to be drafted for next season, the 2021 season. I had really started to feel really confident in my skills and my abilities, and it kind of just got taken away, literally from... Like, one week we were practicing and the next week we weren't.

And there was no sense of... You know, I was in New York City in March, we were in the center of things. It was really terrifying. We had no idea when we would ever play again. I don't think... You know, I'm a bit of a catastrophizer, so I envisioned a future where we would be playing roller derby for a few years, but I don't think anybody else did, so that's been a struggle. And then, you know, the course of this year has been wild, and without the structure of roller derby I personally have, like, not kept up with my athleticism, not kept up with my fitness.



That's been hard, so those other things that were being managed really well have fallen off. I don't have that sense of community anymore. Over the summer my family moved from New York to Portland, Oregon, so that was, like, a huge transition. It was something we wanted and something we'd been working for, for years, but it was at a really inopportune moment so I didn't get to say goodbye to my league mates.

**Julie:** Oh man...

**Amanda:** Because of the flux of roller derby I'm still officially connected to my home league in New York, but once things start up again, you know, I will have to transition to a new league and basically start over.

**Julie:** Oh, I was going to ask. You don't transfer over? You've got to start over from the beginning?

**Amanda:** If you are a skating member of the league you can transfer, but because I am not, that was not an option for me. Because I haven't been playing derby and because I haven't been keeping up with my athletics, my skills have decreased. Even the most elite skaters in the world, no matter how much cross-training you do, no matter how much time you spend on skates otherwise, there is no substitute for playing the game and practicing derby. There are unique skills that every single player across the globe is losing because they are not playing the sport.

The path to playing derby again is going to be slow. Like I said, their return-to-play plan is intentionally slow and gradual. I have my doubts we'll see any official gameplay in 2021. I think everyone is just excited to get back to practice, which hopefully will happen by the end of the year. But you know, there's hope for the future.

They are playing roller derby again in New Zealand and Australia because their timeline within the return-to-play plan is allowing that. So, that's like... On one hand I'm over-the-moon ecstatic, happy for them, and on the other hand I'm seething with jealousy. I'll watch Instagram stories from leagues in Australia and they're just, like, skating around the track with their friends and my whole body turns green. [laughs]

**Julie:** So are there, like, bouts televised? Not televised, but are they streamed live on Twitch or on YouTube? Can you watch them live?

**Amanda:** Absolutely. Definitely. The WFTDA has a YouTube channel that has hundreds of games going back, you know, ten years. If there's an individual league in your area you can search for them on social media. They might have recordings of their games that they've played available to watch.

Watching roller derby at all levels, from like the most basic, beginning leagues to elite champs, which I was lucky enough to see in person in Montreal last November, is incredible. I mean, these people... Folks who play roller derby are incredible athletes. It's astonishing to watch. It's amazing.

I will say, like, starting to watch gameplay without knowing what's going on is very challenging when you don't know the rules. I would recommend, if you have someone in your life who knows derby, you can watch it with them in your ear and telling you what's going on. Once you get the hang of watching it, it's amazing to see.

**Julie:** So, I expect you need to have some cardiovascular strength, you need to have physical strength because you're, you know, pushing people around. Besides scrimmages, how do you train for derby?

**Amanda:** Basically, everything you can think of athletically, you need for roller derby. You need core strength, you need lower body strength, you need upper body strength, you need incredible balance, you need incredible speed. Your endurance is key. Like I said, the jams can only go for two minutes, but skating at full speed for two minutes, and then... You're not really skating full speed at two minutes anymore; that's not how the game is played. But you are skating as fast as you can for, let's say, six seconds, and then immediately having to physically fight your way past people who are trying to keep you from passing them, to then be able to immediately transition again to incredible speed once you have passed them. It's an incredible athletic endeavor.

**Julie:** Should it be in the Olympics?

**Amanda:** Oh my god! Yes! We've been trying for many years to get into the Olympics. The fact that breakdancing will be in the Olympics in the future and roller derby isn't is ridiculous. It's astounding.

**Julie:** That's so... Yeah, that's right, they're adding it. That's hilarious.

**Amanda:** I mean, good for break dancers, I guess. Also athletes; I'm not knocking them. I think the public perception of roller derby is hard to get past, that it's this very theatrical, you know, WWE-style thing, which there were elements of that in the past but that's not how it's played. It's a serious sport. The people who play it are serious athletes. There's still some... I mean, I love the campier aspects of derby too, like the derby names, and bout makeup, and things like that, but the days of fishnets and tutus are gone. Which you know, for better or worse, there are absolutely joys and benefits to that, but people who play roller derby now are serious athletes and they deserve to be seen that way.

**Julie:** What is with the names? What's that about?

**Amanda:** There is this sense of, like, an alter ego. I think roller derby, not being a professional sport, it means that every person who plays roller derby has a day job. Every person who plays roller derby has a life outside of derby. I have played with folks who are lawyers, folks who are doctors, folks who are teachers, parents, engineers... I think part of the reason why their Covid response was so robust was because people in leadership are epidemiologists, people in leadership are policymakers, and scientists, and doctors. So, there is no, like, monolith of, "We're just jocks and we don't know how to do anything else." The incredible asset of roller derby is that everyone has other skills that they bring to the league, and to gameplay, and to the community as a whole.

I think that the roller derby names just give people this sense of, like, "This is my alter ego. This is who I am in my off hours," and there's a lot of freedom in that. There's a lot of freedom in... There's a lot to be said about makeup, and costuming, and putting on a different identity in order to reveal your true self. And I think especially when women in a predominantly, like, female-oriented sport, you know, it's a chance to shed a lot of the social expectations of your gender, which is being sweet, and likeable, and demure. You have an opportunity to come into this space and to be aggressive, and to be assertive, and not sweet, and be intense in a way that is not socially acceptable for women to be. So I think giving a name to that identity is really important for a lot of people.

**Julie:** And how did you go about choosing your name?

**Amanda:** Oh my gosh! It was such a process! I'm an overthinker, I'm sure you can glean. I hemmed and hawed about it for, like, two years. And I came up with a thousand

iterations. A lot of roller derby names tend to be puns, which I love puns so it's kind of ironic that my name currently is not a pun. But eventually I settled on Gin and Ginger; that's my roller derby name. It just felt right, so I go by Gin usually, colloquially. [laughs]

**Julie:** That's awesome.

**Amanda:** I love... Yeah, this is definitely a debate in the community. Some people want to put the more theatrical elements of derby aside so that it's taken more seriously so it becomes a more respected sport. But personally, I love those parts. That, to me, is just... There is a joy about it, sort of like a reckless joy about sparkly, silly makeup, and calling yourself Hermione Danger, or Beyonslay. There is power and joy in that that I personally really appreciate, and I definitely understand why people don't and want to see those things fade. But for me personally, I will hold onto derby names and bout makeup 'til my last dying breath.

**Julie:** [laughs] I love that. So, if someone... Obviously there's no joining derby right now, but you know, when it comes time, and if someone is interested and wants to get into derby, either watching it or participating in it, how would you suggest they get started?

**Amanda:** I think the easiest thing to do, which is what I did, was just... You go and google 'roller derby near' your zip code. There is absolutely going to be roller derby somewhere near you in the United States and almost definitely in other countries, especially European and Asian countries. They're everywhere. I would say go to WFTDA, the Women's Flat Track Derby Association YouTube page. There's hundreds of hours of footage there.

I'm not sure how Twitch works specifically, and obviously there's no streaming of games happening now, but NERDerby is a big Twitch streamer. He's an incredible asset to the community. He spends a lot of his own time and money making sure that derby is available to people who can't see it, especially right now when there's no play happening. If you contacted your local league and you said, "How can I help?" There's definitely something that you could do.

Roller skating in general had a big boon over the summer, thanks, I think, mostly to TikTok. I'm in my 30s so I don't understand TikTok. [laughs] But for a few months and even now, it's very difficult to obtain roller skates. They are sold out everywhere. Manufacturing and production is delayed for obvious reasons. I'm sure lots of people have a pair of roller skates that they bought in July and they wore twice and now are sitting in their closet. So I would encourage you to just keep trying. It's winter now, and it's hard to skate inside, and there's no places to skate indoors...

**Julie:** Maybe do some cross-training to get yourself fit?

**Amanda:** Yeah! If you have linoleum in your kitchen you can find videos of folks teaching jam skating, dance skating. There is an incredible, robust, beautiful history of roller skating in the Black community and a big reckoning for both derby and roller skating in general is recognizing and valuing that history and not whitewashing it with skinny white ladies dancing in roller skates in TikTok. I think that's a really crucial part of learning about roller skating in general, rink skating, dance skating.

There was a *New York Times* piece from earlier this month called "Meet Bill Butler: The Godfather of Roller Disco." That gives a really good overview of him and his influence in New York City's roller skating community and the worldwide community. I would say, if you want to get involved you should just do it. It's really hard. It took me months to work up the courage to sign up for my league. And obviously that's not something that

can happen right now, but like I said, your league in your area will be able to use you in some way.

**Julie:** It sounds like they're pretty welcoming too, so it's not, like, intimidating.

**Amanda:** Absolutely, yeah. Again, like any organization of human beings, everything has conflicts, and issues, and underlying stuff, but overall people in roller derby want you to be there. They want the sport to grow. They want the sport to be able to impact as many people as it can. And it's fun. It's fun to roller skate. It's fun to go fast. It's fun to smack people around. It's fun to get smacked around.

I can't tell you how many times... There have been so many times when I'm on the track and someone lands just this beautiful, choice hit on me, and I go flying, and they turn around, and they say, "Are you okay??" And I'm just like, "That was awesome!! That was such a good hit! I went flying!! Did you see how far I went??! My ass is killing me!!" I think there's a joy in that.

**Julie:** [laughs] And after this last 18 months, I think people are going to want to start going fast and pushing people around.

**Amanda:** Yeah, even if you... If you have no interest in playing or getting involved in running a volunteer-run nonprofit, which is admittedly a lot of work, when they start playing games again, go see them. Buy merch, pay for tickets. It's fun. It's great. And I think, like, celebrate the athleticism of people, and celebrate... I love the topic of this podcast, obviously, in general, but I think roller derby is a really wonderful representation of doing what you love because it is absolutely a labor of love.

There are very few social or financial benefits to playing roller derby, to running a league, to running a global organization. It is all done out of just the love of playing and love of the community. It is all volunteers. It is all people taking the time out of their... Most people who are making roller derby happen use every minute of their free time to make roller derby happen. It's just really cool and fun to be a part of. I feel really, really grateful.

**Julie:** Yeah. Well, Amanda, thank you so much for sharing your excitement, and your joy, and your enthusiasm, and passion about derby. It's been enlightening for me and I think probably for my listeners as well. Thank you so much for coming on the show.

**Amanda:** Thank you so much for having me. I love bringing awareness to a sport that I love that I think a lot of people don't really know about. So, I'm hoping that this inspires folks to learn about it.

---

You can find Amanda on Instagram [@GinandGingerSkates](#), and she's also provided me with some incredible links to roller derby resources, so definitely check out all of that in the show notes.

Just a reminder that you can find this podcast on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](#), and on Twitter, [@WhatYouLovePod](#), and the website is [LoveWhatYouLovePod.com](#).

All of the transcripts for *Love What You Love* are available for everyone on the website. Thanks, as always, to the lovely and wonderful Emily White for the fantastic transcripts. If you need transcripts, reach out to her at [HireEmilyWhite@gmail.com](mailto:HireEmilyWhite@gmail.com). The music for *Love What You Love* is called "Inspiring Hope" by Pink-Sounds. A link to that artist is in the show notes as well.

As always, thank you so much for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

**Links:**

Find Amanda on [Instagram](#)

[Women's Flat Track Derby Association](#)

[Gotham Roller Derby](#)

[Samantha Bee segment on Derby and COVID](#)

Most Derby leagues are nonprofit organizations, so if you'd like to support Derby, that's a great place to start!

**My favorite nonprofits:**

[Humane Society Silicon Valley](#)

[World Central Kitchen](#)

We're on [Patreon](#)

Hang out with me on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)

Check out my books at [JulieKRose.com](#)

LWYL Music: [Inspiring Hope by Pink-Sounds](#)

Transcribed by Emily White: [HireEmilyWhite@gmail.com](mailto:HireEmilyWhite@gmail.com)