



ORGANIZING ROLLER DERBY

“Skating helped me identify who I wanted to become — inside and outside”

~ Apolo Ohno
*two-time Olympic gold medalist;
Olympic silver medalist;
two-time Olympic bronze medalist,
short-track speedskating*

A composite image featuring two photos of Apolo Ohno. On the left, a smaller photo shows him as a young child roller skating. On the right, a larger photo shows him as an adult speed skater wearing a yellow helmet with the number 4 and a USA logo, holding a large American flag. The background of the entire section is dark blue with the text "who I wanted to become" faintly visible in a light blue font.

Starting a Roller Derby Organization

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USA ROLLER SPORTS

Amateur roller sports competitions have taken place in the United States since 1937. Today, the membership of USA Roller Sports (USARS) includes skaters in four disciplines (derby, figure, hockey, and speed skating) who, in turn, belong to amateur skating clubs across the United States. In addition to promoting roller sports nationwide, USARS administers competitive roller sports from its national headquarters in Lincoln, Nebraska.

USARS, a non-profit corporation under Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, is the National Governing Body (NGB) for amateur roller sports in the United States under the Amateur Sports Act of 1978. USARS is a member of:



- The United States Olympic Committee (USOC), the premier sports organization for amateur skaters in the United States.



- The Federation International de Roller Sports (FIRS), the governing body of roller sports worldwide. FIRS, which is recognized by the International Olympic Committee and the General Assembly of International Sports Federations, is comprised of 80 national roller skating federations, in all five continents.



- The Pan American Sports Organization (PASO), which governs the amateur sports of all nations located in the Western Hemisphere.

USARS MEMBERSHIP PRIVILEGES

Individual USARS memberships are valid for the competitive season that is active during the date of application. The USARS competitive season is from January 1st through December 31st.

Benefits of USARS membership to individuals include:

- Participation in competitive events sanctioned by USARS
- Free subscription to USA Roller Sports, The Magazine
- Registered member skaters/coaches of USA Roller Sports are provided with excess (secondary) accident/medical expense benefits in the amount of \$50,000 (subject to deductible) for injuries occurring **ON SKATES** limited to organized and supervised practice sessions held within USA Roller Sports chartered club facilities, or during USA Roller Sports sanctioned competitions and/or USA Roller Sports training sessions sanctioned by national headquarters specified to occur outside of club facilities. The event must be supervised by a club officer (or an official USA Roller Sports coach) or the USA Roller Sports designated leader of an USA Roller Sports sponsored event. The individual will be required to certify the validity of the claim being submitted. No coverage is extended to a skater injured while on skates, but who is not in training for USA Roller Sports competitions.

HISTORY OF ROLLER DERBY

The term roller derby dates at least as far back as 1922. Leo Seltzer, a film publicist, combined aspects of dance marathons (“walkathons” as they were commonly referred to) and roller skating into the first Transcontinental Roller Derby event in 1935. It was originally a stimulation of cross-country roller skating where 25 two-person teams circled a track thousands of times to cover 3,000 miles. Skaters skated up to 11 ½ hours a day, and were disqualified if both members were off the track during skating times. After the first Transcontinental Roller Derby event, Seltzer decided to take a portable track and hold similar races throughout the U.S. As the skaters tried to lap those in front of them, there were occasional collisions and crashes and this quickly became the most exciting part. Realizing this, sportswriter, Damon Runyon, encouraged Seltzer to change the game to incorporate more physical contact between skaters. Although Seltzer was somewhat leery of this, he agreed to try it and the fans loved it! Over time, roller derby has evolved into a sport involving two teams of five skaters where teams score points by lapping members of the opposing team.

OVERVIEW OF THE GAME

Roller derby is a game played by two teams on roller skates, on an elliptical Track, in contests called “Jams” that last up to two minutes each. Each team will have up to five total players on the Track, including four Blockers (one Blocker is called the Pivot and has a stripe on his/her helmet) and one Jammer (who will have a star on his/her helmet). Each team will have one scoring player (which may be either the Jammer or, under some circumstances, the Pivot) who will earn points by passing opposing players on the Track. Blockers skate together in a group, called the Pack. Each team’s Blockers will attempt to assist their own scorer in navigating the pack, while simultaneously trying to prevent the opposing scorer from making his/her way through the Pack. The team with the most points at the conclusion of the game will be the winner.

RECRUITMENT

Recruit players, officials, non-skating officials, coaches, and volunteers. Put ads and fliers everywhere: in newspapers, online, and all around town (gyms, community centers, malls, grocery stores, colleges/universities, etc.). Spread the word by talking to friends and family whenever you get the chance. Social networking (Facebook®, My Space®, Twitter®) is a great way to get the word out. Hold an info session to go over the basics of roller derby and the organization. It is a good idea to also hold an open practice so interested parties can come check it out. You will need about 10-20 players and 1-3 officials (refs) to get started.

RULES

There are a number of different rule sets that are utilized by derby organizations worldwide (based on their own preference). The first USARS rule set was made official in January of 2012; the rule book is available at usarollersports.org.



GEAR

Protective gear is mandatory in roller derby. At a minimum, a helmet, knee pads, elbow pads, wrist guards, and a mouth guard must be worn. Other protective gear (padded shorts, sport glasses, etc.) can be worn as long as it does not interfere with other players. Most people buy their derby gear online or at a skating rink so take some time to research different products and find what fits your needs best. If you are not sure about sizing, be sure to ask as most places will be able to help you figure out sizes and measurements over the phone or through email.

PRACTICE SPACE

Finding a place to practice is often the biggest hurdle that new organizations face, depending on the area. Start by contacting your local rink (if you have one) or look for places like an arena, gym, warehouse, outdoor skate rinks, parking lots, etc. When looking at venues, be sure to check the skating surface to make sure it is smooth and that you won't damage it too much with skates. Wide open spaces that are big enough for a regulation track are great. Once you think you've found the perfect place, you will want to see if they are willing to sign a contract. Having a contract is not absolutely necessary, but it offers some assurance that your practice schedule won't be disrupted mid-season. The contract should include practice times, monthly fees, and expectations of both parties. Monthly rent should ideally be covered by your organization's dues, sponsorships, and other revenues.

TRAINING

As soon as you have locked down a practice space, start skating (everyone will be dying to get on their skates by this time)! Remember that the majority of the players will be new to the sport, and may be novice players, so start slowly. The veteran players can help show the new members some basics (getting comfortable on skates, proper falls, and skating in a group). Check the local skating rink to see if they offer any beginner's classes or if a speed or figure skating coach might be willing to assist. If you are not able to find a coach right away, have the players rotate running practices.

Start each practice by stretching and doing a small warm up; 10 minutes or so to get loose. Cardio is the best way to get the blood flowing and warm that body up. Next, incorporate a wide variety of skating drills (focus on all aspects hitting, endurance, speed, etc.). Try and reserve some time to scrimmage at practices so you can put everything together and utilize the concepts taught during the individual drills. It is best to wait to incorporate scrimmaging into practices until the organization has existed and been practicing for at least 6 months (don't push things too soon). Finally, make sure you take some time to cool down and stretch at the end of each practice.

Use the Internet to seek out drills for practices. Eventually, you will be able to come up with some of your own favorites, but there are tons of derby resources out there (You Tube® videos especially). Many roller derby publications and blog sites also feature training drills.

Encourage players to attend derby boot camps (a derby organization-sponsored training event) and/or consider having a nearby organization come help run a practice. These provide great opportunities to pick up tips and tricks from other players.

Schedule practices according to what is best for the players. You may want to start with 2 practices a week for 2 hours each and then increase as the organization progresses (as long as you can afford it). You won't be able to accommodate every single person's schedule so use the times that are best for the majority. If possible, offer optional training times for players

who may have missed a regular practice or those that need some extra training. Make sure you take attendance at every practice to ensure that all organization policies can be properly enforced.

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

Roller derby currently lives in a hybrid existence, as an amateur sport (players, for the most part, are not paid) that is marketed to the public in the same fashion as most professional sports (ticket sales, merchandise, sponsorships, etc.) and there are a lot of choices available in terms of structuring your organization. The initial organizer(s) will need to decide upon the structure and ownership of the organization. Do you envision a centrally-managed, privately owned entity (similar to most professional sports teams), or a more communally-operated and owned entity (similar to most amateur sports leagues)? The structure you select will not only determine the style of operation, but may also impact the liability of the participants. Some things to consider:

- No formal entity: If you choose not to create any formal entity for your organization, then the operator(s) will be personally responsible for the liabilities of the organization, including but not limited to personal injury, negligence, and a breach of contract. An individual will need to sign any agreements (sponsorship agreement, lease, game agreements, etc.) personally.
- Formal entity with group governance: Many roller derby organizations have chosen to form a corporation or limited liability company (check your state's Secretary of State website for information regarding the distinctions, and consult an attorney for the finer points). The entity may be for-profit or not-for-profit, depending upon your goals for the organization. If charitable works are an important part of your organization's purpose, then not-for-profit may be the best route for you. If you'd like to generate income for promoting the organization, training the players, etc., maybe for-profit will be your best fit. Under the group governance model, regardless of your profit status, the organization will be run by officers (if a corporation) or managers (if an LLC), who will report to the Board of Directors (if a corporation) or the Members (if an LLC). The officers or managers will be players, and each active player will have a voice and the majority will rule. Leadership roles (officers, managers, etc.) will generally be for temporary terms of a year or two. Committees will generally be created within the organization to manage various tasks required for the organization (Player Training, Advertising and Promotions, Game Production, Player Recruiting, etc.), and committee chair will change annually.
- Formal entity with centralized governance: This organizational model resembles a business in that decision-making and ownership rest within a central core, and the organization is run by individuals who may or may not all be players, while the players are freed from the committee and operational responsibilities to focus primarily on training and promoting the sport. Without periodic turnover in the leadership, this organization might have more long-range planning capacity, but its success hinges on having a solid, dedicated ownership group willing to tackle all of the organization's needs without relying on the players for daily operation support.

Once you have decided on your structure, you may consult your state's Secretary of State website for the forms you'll need to file in order to create your entity. If you have elected a not-for-profit status, please consult a qualified accountant before filing any documents, as the requirements for and consequences of not-for-profit status involve both state and federal laws, and professional guidance is highly recommended.

Set up a bank account as soon as possible to handle your organization's finances. Check with your local bank to see what is required (corporation name, number if registered, directors' names, etc.) to open the organization's account. You will want at least 2 people with signing authority on the account.

Receipts should be kept for everything so that the funds can be diligently tracked, both for internal accounting purposes and for tax returns. If your organization is player-operated (as opposed to centrally owned and managed), your players will want access to financial statements also.

BYLAWS & POLICIES

The organization will need to create manuals that include detailed bylaws and policies by which the organization will operate. Utilize existing roller derby organizations and review online derby forums for tips and ideas on different governance structures. You may want to include some of the following:

- ❖ Mission Statement
- ❖ Organization Ownership
- ❖ Financial Guidelines: profit sharing, disclosure, reimbursement, confidentiality
- ❖ Organization Membership: eligibility, attendance requirements, dues
- ❖ Directors: functions, elections & terms, removal, board meetings
- ❖ Officers & Committees: duties
- ❖ Code of Conduct: safety, sportsmanship, disciplinary action
- ❖ Fiscal Year
- ❖ Control Over Bylaws

INSURANCE

Consult an insurance professional about obtaining liability insurance for the organization. If your organization does not have significant assets, it may be wise to start with a small policy and increase the coverage as your organization grows. It is highly recommended that all players carry their own primary health insurance. Consider obtaining secondary accident/injury coverage for the players. USA Roller Sports member organizations and players are provided with insurance as one of the benefits of membership- please see the 'Roller Derby Guide' online for additional information regarding obtaining membership with USARS or contact the USARS National Office for more information.



MARKETING

Once the organization is established and running, your job is not done- now it's time to promote! Develop a logo, website, and merchandise for the organization. Use these things to share information with the community about its newest sports team. It's never too early to start attracting fans for your organization's inaugural competitive season. Let those creative juices flow and see what the players can come up with. If the organization is able to develop the logo(s), it will save money, but be mindful of trademark and copyright laws. You may want to invest a few hundred dollars in a trademark search before investing hundreds more in merchandise and apparel that could infringe the rights of others. Once you have settled on a logo and/or trade name, look into state and/or federal registration of your marks. While registration is not absolutely necessary in all cases, it does offer a lot of advantages in terms of enforcing your rights against infringers.

Press releases can help attract local media attention to your organization. Interviews and audio/video spots will help publicize your efforts. Utilize community event calendars available through print and electronic media. Flyers promoting your games can be posted in a variety of community locations. Approach local businesses about posting flyers or posters prior to your games. Hit the local colleges and universities, and weekend hot spots (clubs and bars, sporting events, concerts and shows) and hand out those flyers. Once finances permit, purchased advertising can be a worthwhile investment in increasing fan attendance at games. Email blasts, radio spots, and local print media can all help you reach your fans.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As the new team in town, you'll want to begin building relationships within the community. This will help cultivate your fan base, your recruitment pool, your sponsors and volunteers, and your marketing and promotions for opportunities. Involvement with local charities is a great way to show the community that the organization is contributing to the community while participating in something they love. Consider donating part or all of the proceeds from games and organization fundraisers, donating some used items (clothing, skates, etc.), or scheduling players to volunteer their time.

Get involved in community events. You can volunteer at events and promote the organization simultaneously- parades, festivals, public events, etc. Networking is a huge part of derby and this is a prime opportunity to do so- you may find new sponsor or practice space by simply spreading the word.



FINANCING

- **Group Fundraising:**

Fundraising is one way to meet the organization's operating costs, especially in the player-managed organizational model. Below are some basic fundraising ideas:

- ❖ Car wash
- ❖ Bake sales
- ❖ Local bands/shows
- ❖ Drawings/Raffles: find something to raffle off and sell tickets
- ❖ Host a party (holiday, seasonal, etc.): it will take a little money to put on, but you should make money in the end
- ❖ Sell merchandise: calendars, shirts, buttons, stickers, water bottles, etc.
- ❖ Silent Auctions: get donations from sponsors and the organization so you don't have to purchase items
- ❖ Skate-a-thon

- **Investors:**

In the case of a centrally-owned organization, your owners are likely your investors, each pledging a certain amount of cash toward the organization's initial operations. Once the organization can begin hosting games, ticket, merchandise and food/beverage sales will begin generating the revenue to sustain the organization, and the investors will ideally be reimbursed for their initial investment(s). Because the investors have taken the initial financial risk, their ownership interest will entitle them to receive profits from the organization, as well. Depending upon the goals and bylaws of the organization, this return on investment may be limited in various ways to ensure the health and prosperity of the organization.

- **Sponsors:**

Whether group-managed or centrally owned, sponsors are an important source of revenue and can also enhance your organization's image and appeal by partaking in the good will of sponsor. For example, your sponsor Chick-Fil-A® may help create appeal for your organization among families in your area, while the alternative radio station sponsorship may boost your exposure to and appeal among young hipsters. In exchange for their investment, your sponsor may receive prominent recognition at games (banners, program pages, etc.), special events appearances (team demonstration during a promotional event), game tickets, VIP seating, and more. The arrangements can vary widely, so use your imagination when approaching a potential sponsor. Maybe they don't have cash to invest, but can offer goods or services that will be of value to your organization.



TIPS FOR MANAGING A SUCCESSFUL SPORTS PROGRAM

- Networking is a great way to learn more about the sport and its current trends. Individuals that are dedicated to roller derby will be more than willing to impart what they know to someone who shares their enthusiasm. Take the time to contact other clubs (start locally if possible) for assistance and advice as you begin this new journey.
- Strong communication (verbal and written) skills are vital to success in the sports world so consider that when selecting leadership roles.
- Choose coaches and leaders carefully as these are the individuals that will be largely responsible for portraying the organization's image and you want it to be positive!
- Don't get in over your head when starting- take the time to do your research before making decisions! Make sure that you know all your options then map things out and know what the next steps are.
- Set goals, both in competition and the organization. Of course everyone wants to win, but take time to recognize other accomplishments as well- top fundraising efforts, perfect attendance at practice, etc.
- Treat your volunteers respectfully- their time and contributions are partially responsible for the programs' achievements so let them know that you appreciate their efforts. Tokens of appreciation may include: discounted or free admission to events, reduced membership fees, complimentary refreshments, etc.



The USA Roller Sports web site, www.usarollersports.org , features the very latest news and information regarding roller sports competitions, athletes, and more. From a calendar of events detailing competitions all across the nation to dynamic first hand coverage of international world championships, USA Roller Sports provides all the information you need right at your fingertips. The web site contains valuable resources to get your club rolling in the right direction. If you are unable to locate the information you are looking for, please contact the USARS National Office.

BEST WISHES AND GOOD LUCK !!!



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