



12:00
Jam
0

WELCOME CENTER
Welcome to Crow Inverness Center

HOSSON

DANGER

DOIT'S



Beyond The Law: Jennifer Eastman

Interview by Daniel J. Murphy
Photos by Emma Sato Murphy and Daniel J. Murphy

Circling the flat track just prior to the starting whistle, the women of the Central Maine Derby revel in the enthusiastic cheers of their hometown fans at the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor. Introducing the skaters by their derby names, the announcer explains that today's derby is a distant relative of the more theatrical version of the sport that peaked in popularity in the 1940's. Modern roller derby is a strategic game where offense and defense are continually in flux, as each team's jammer tries to score points by breaking through the opposing team's blockers. Although elbowing, tripping, and other illegal maneuvers are forbidden, hip checks, hip whips, and targeted blocks are conspicuously permitted in this fast-paced contact sport. For Jennifer Eastman, who goes by the moniker Miss Anthrope when she is on the track, roller derby has become an unexpected source of physical challenge, mental stimulation, and sustaining camaraderie. Eastman, who otherwise practices estate and elder law at Rudman Winchell in Bangor, sat down with the *Maine Bar Journal* to discuss her interest.

MBJ: Could you please tell our readers about your interest?

JE: I am the president and one of the founders of Central Maine Roller Derby, a women's flat track roller derby league based in Bangor. We started in the spring of 2012 with about 10 women who were interested in playing roller derby. Since that time, we have grown to a league of about 50 members. We have female skaters and male referees and volunteers. It is a wonderful group of people.

MBJ: What is it about roller derby that appeals to you?

JE: It's the only sport I know where you play offense and defense at the same time. It is like chess on wheels. It is entirely strategic. That's one of the things that I really love about it. It is not just a physically demanding sport; it's really much more of a mental game. It is a full contact sport, but much like

hockey, there are legal and illegal hitting zones and actions, and a penalty will send a skater to the penalty box for 30 seconds. The hits are hard and real, but there's no hair pulling, punching, or tripping.

MBJ: How did you become interested in roller derby?

JE: When I was pregnant with my third child, I saw a documentary about the roller derby team in Austin, Texas, which is where flat track derby started. I watched that and just knew that I had missed my calling. It was just the coolest thing that I had ever seen. I grew up playing sports and have always enjoyed team sports, but as an adult woman, there are really few opportunities to take part in a team event that's really competitive. So I promised myself that after I had that baby I would make roller derby happen in Bangor. I knew there was a league in Portland and got a lot of advice from them before we started.

MBJ: For the uninitiated, could you describe roller derby for our readers?

JE: Yes, and that's a question that I get asked often. People will say, Roller derby? Like I used to watch on TV on Saturday mornings? Modern-day roller derby is a bit different. It developed in





the early 2000s. Primarily, we play flat track roller derby, not banked track like the old days. We tape a rope to the floor and that's our track. A game is made up of two 30-minute halves, which are made up of jams that last up to two minutes each. The teams play five on five for each jam. There's one skater on each team that wears a star on her helmet; she's the jammer. The rest of the skaters are blockers, and the blockers stay together in a pack. The job of the jammer is to get through the pack and lap the pack. Then, every time the jammer passes a member of the opposing team, she scores a point. The first jammer through the pack is designated as the lead jammer, and she can call the jam off any time before the two minutes runs. The blocker's job is to help her jammer get through

the pack and score points, while at the same time stopping the opposing jammer from getting through the pack.

MBJ: How has the reception been for the league?

JE: It has been fabulous. We have the best fans, and we have major support from the Greater Bangor community. We play our games—we call them bouts—at the Cross Insurance Center here in Bangor. It is an absolutely phenomenal facility. We had the mayor of Bangor blow the first whistle at our first game here, which was fun. Modern roller derby is a very grass roots movement. A big part of that involves giving back to the community that supports us. We have had great success with that. We developed our signature program that we call Skate Don't Hate.

We go out to schools all over Central Maine and talk to kids about bullying, how to deal with it, and how to not be a part of it. Our league is this very diverse group of women who have come together to be a team. We don't always get along, but we need to respect each other, and work together, to be successful. We find that's very analogous to kids' experiences in school these days. The kids are very excited and motivated by it. That has helped us gain a lot of fans and grow a great reputation in the community.

MBJ: Does your league compete against other leagues?

JE: Yes. We compete against other leagues all over New England and Atlantic Canada. I think Hartford is the furthest we've gone. We've been to Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island several times. We've been to St. John and Fredericton, New Brunswick.

MBJ: How has your league done on the road?

JE: We do pretty well for a new team. We've only been doing this for a couple of years, and we have taken on some teams that have considerably more experience than we have. This summer we played one of the home teams from the Boston Derby Dames, which included skaters who play on Boston's nationally ranked All Star team. We win some games and we lose some games. It really just depends on the level of team that we are playing. For me personally, I never really care what the score is. It is so much fun to do this, and it is so much about community and women having this fantastic time playing a contact sport on roller skates. It doesn't really matter who wins or who loses. You get to play, that's a win.

MBJ: What are some of the big challenges of the sport?

JE: We have had our share of broken ankles on our league. We've had a couple of concussions, too. That can be very scary. We do wear full gear. We wear helmets, mouth guards, elbow pads, wrist guards, and knee pads.



But injuries do happen like they do in any sport. It's a big time commitment. You could skate and practice six days a week if you wanted to. Running the league takes a huge amount of time, setting up events, games and fundraising. It's a common joke that roller derby can consume your life, but it's true. I'm so very fortunate and grateful that my husband and children support me in this. I could never play roller derby and have a law career and be a mom without the massive support that I get from my family. I'm not sure I could do any two of those without the great support that I receive.

MBJ: How many days a week do you skate and practice?

JE: I shoot for two nights a week and three or four hours on Sundays.

MBJ: What are some of the rewarding aspects of roller derby for you?

JE: I think a lot of people think of roller derby as punk rock girls with tattoos beating each other up entertainment, but it's really a very athletic endeavor. Today's roller derby is a very competitive sport. The women in our league include a couple of doctors, professors at the University of Maine, a bank manager, and a nuclear engineer. So one of the things that I really

love about my league is that these are fascinating, smart women from really different backgrounds that I would never get to know or become friends with just because of the differences in our lives. But they've become some of the closest friends I've ever had. I am passionate about this sport for so many reasons. The opportunity to follow your passion with your whole heart, and watch it come to fruition because of your blood, sweat and hard work is a pretty rewarding experience in itself.

MBJ: Any intersection between your legal world and this particular world?

JE: It's funny because the more my derby life goes on, the more analogies I see between roller derby and everything else. It always seems to come back to roller derby. Managing a league of 50 women ranging in ages from 19 to 50-something with different backgrounds and careers and lots of opinions is a constant exercise in communication. That crosses over to anything that you do. I'm an estate planning attorney, so I like to think that I come across as a nice girl. When I have probate litigation cases, I like to think that my clients feel encouraged knowing that I can be this very aggressive person on the track and that can carry over to the courtroom. And I do think to some extent, knowing

that I am this aggressive athlete on the track gives me some extra confidence to be in other adversarial situations. You have to keep your cool and focus on the goal.

MBJ: What's the best advice you've ever received?

JE: A very wise woman once told me, you can wear the same pair of black pants every day and no one will ever notice. She was right.



Daniel J. Murphy is a shareholder in Bernstein Shur's Business Law and Litigation Practice Groups, where his practice concentrates on business and commercial litigation matters.

Beyond the Law features conversations with Maine lawyers who pursue unique interests or pastimes. Readers are invited to suggest candidates for *Beyond the Law* by contacting Dan Murphy at dmurphy@bernsteinshur.com.