Megan Matteson rolls on as Zoe Trocious
by Ross Forman
Windy City Times
2010-02-24

Megan Matteson had only been on roller skates a few times in her life—all while in middle school. So she had no interest in joining the Windy City Rollers (WCR), but rather, a local rugby league, the sport she played in college.

"I had a friend already on the [roller derby] league, Ada Hatelace, and after watching her play in every game for over a season, it slowly grew on me," said Matteson, 29, who lives in Chicago's Lincoln Square neighborhood.

"The more I watched [roller derby], the more I thought, 'I could do that!'"

"My friend took me to the roller rink and said, 'As long as you're not clinging to the wall the entire time, the rest will come; we can teach you how to skate. You're an athlete and in great shape, so you should give it a try.'"

A month later, Matteson was trying out on borrowed skates. And a few months after that, she was drafted to the Manic Attackers, one of four teams in the WCR.

Matteson blossomed into Zoe Trocious.

"I tried out for the Windy City Rollers in June of 2008, and was drafted to the Manic Attackers that October. I was really lucky and proud to have been drafted so quickly to a home team," she said. "On the Manics, I eventually will be a regular jammer; that's what I've been working towards, and where I'll start to play more this season.

"During my first season [in 2009], it was more about being a body on the track and trying to learn quickly how to be useful and get a good feel for the game. I often got put in as an offensive blocker, though I don't know how successful I have ever been in that role. I think my strengths blocking lend more to defense. As a blocker, I rely more on being agile and annoying—always on someone with my bony hips and shoulders, never letting them get around me, or jumping in front of them last second and forcing a back-blocking penalty.

"I'm too small to deliver the really devastating hits, I think—at least right now. When I learn to use my weight more I'll be able to. Although I can sneak between people myself, when you're little, it can be more difficult to really move a bigger blocker who's in your jammer's way. However, eventually I would like to play on the travel team, and to do that, I need to be able to play any position—which means not only becoming the best jammer I can be, but figuring out how to block effectively, with whatever I've got."

Matteson is a Michigan native who moved to Chicago after graduating from Michigan State University in 2004. She is a programmer for Paylocity.

Matteson is one of several lesbians in the local roller derby league.

"I watched the Manics lose over and over again [before joining the team]. But, coming onto that team in 2009, I could feel that something had shifted, things were different," she said. "I was really fortunate to have been part of the championship 2009 season, not just because it's fun to win, but because it taught me a lot as a skater about what it takes to be successful. We didn't just breeze through our season, even if it may have seemed that way because we won most of the games leading up to the championship. I particularly feel lucky that I got to skate with skaters like Ying O'Fire and Helsa Wayten and Malice with Chains, before they either retired or moved on to other things. I learned a lot from having them as teammates. I feel like, with 2009 under my belt, and added to that my participation in the inaugural season of a 'B-string' travel team this summer, I'm ready to be a skater the Manics
can count on in 2010."

The 2010 WCR season opened in late January. "I've always played sports where I could rely on the fact that I'm very fast. But, I am not so fast on skates," Trocious said. "And usually I consider myself to be an agile person, but it is like learning to walk all over again in some ways. Every way I moved my body had to be re-learned to function while rolling along at high speed. It is still something I struggle with. Some skaters come to the league with a lot of skating experience, but no sports experience and/or in terrible fitness. Others like me come in with fitness, but have to learn to be good skaters. It's an interesting mix. It has definitely pushed me to learn a lot of new things, and to approach sports in a new way. As a fellow Manic, Mo Vengeance, has said it before: what other sport can you think of where there are two balls in play at once? Roller derby is athletically challenging, but it's also mentally challenging and a true team sport."

WCR holds once-a-month matches at the UIC Pavilion, including Feb. 21, March 27 and April 10. "This season I hope to be in the main jammer rotation for my home team, and to hopefully defend our title as league champions; I want to feel more a part of that trophy this year," Trocious said. "Personally, I also want to parlay my experience playing more this year into trying out for, and making, the travel team this season, though I've had some [ injury ] setbacks recently. I was not skating for a few months [ late last year ] and have felt a little out of shape and behind schedule as this season starts. But I'm not one to ever give up. Ask me again later this season how I'm doing, and I'll have something good to tell you."

Matteson is one of many lesbians in the league. Heck, there are several other lesbians on her team. "We haven't done much of anything to market [ WCR ] specifically to the LGBT community, but that is something I think we might want to work on in the future," she said. "We have had some gay groups buy tickets as social outings for their organizations and I hope to see more of that. Roller derby has a little more interesting subculture surrounding the sport rather than a typical sports-fan atmosphere; it definitely is welcoming to LGBT fans. We've had The Power of Cheer perform at a lot of our bouts—sometimes I wonder what the more typical ( straight ) sports fans in the audience will think of them, but actually they are always our most well-received half-time performance during the season. Because of the culture of derby, I think there's a lot of overlap between the derby community and the queer/queer-friendly community.

WCR is a logical stop for the lesbian community, Matteson said. "There are hot girls on skates, playing a fast-paced and highly physical sport," she said. "But really, lesbians on the whole seem to really get into their women's sports, so it's been a mystery to me why we haven't garnered a larger lesbian fan-base."

Wanna know more about Megan Matteson, aka, Zoe Trocious? Here goes:

—I moved here after college to work, live in a bigger place, and live somewhere that I could get around in without owning a car," she said. "I've lived in Chicago about five years now and I feel pretty settled here now, which I honestly didn't expect. I thought I would move around more before being in a city where I could feel so at home."

—Matteson attended Hanover-Horton High School in Horton, Mich.: "Yes, it was so small that it required a hyphen; my school combined two neighboring farm towns worth of people, and yet I graduated in a class of about 80; that was in 1998."

—Went to Michigan State University from 1998-2004: "I started out as an art major, then switched to mathematics, then eventually graduated with a general liberal arts degree."

—Status: "I guess I identify as lesbian, in that I haven't dated or thought about dating men since I was in high school. Once I had that realization about myself and was comfortable with it, I never went back. But I don't think about the labels involved with it very much."

— "The [WCR] league is extremely diverse and open minded and queer friendly.

— Favorite TV show(s): "I only ever watch television shows via Netflix, or online. Even before derby began to take up pretty much my every evening, I've never liked blocking my time around television airing schedules. That being said, I don't watch that much TV at all, really. I like Glee. I was watching Dollhouse because I've always been a big Joss Whedon fan, but I am not caught up. Not many shows are grabbing me right now."

— Favorite Movie(s): "I am a huge fan of foreign cinema, especially French, and horror movies. I also usually see things that were based on books, and try to compare them to the book—I read a lot and it's sort of an amateur field of study for me; adaptations."

— Favorite professional sport: "Strangely, I am not at all a sports fan. I've never even been to a real baseball game or football game. I want to go sometime, though, since I live in Chicago. I do enjoy watching football with my father, but I don't follow it."

— Little-known skills or traits: "I took piano lessons for six years, and I've played drums in two garage bands. Plus, I can juggle."

— Hobbies: She enjoys reading: "I read at least one book a week, mostly fiction, and I follow about 30 comic book titles. I play World of Warcraft when I want to totally escape. I see a lot of French films, usually alone, and although I don't paint that much anymore, I write/draw my own comics."

— Final quote: "I'm single! No, no, just kidding. I'm really proud that I'm a member of one of the top [derby] leagues in the nation. Whenever I travel to watch our travel team play in other cities, it's hard to describe but I really feel a lot of pride in Chicago and WCR. We're hosting nationals this year and not only do I hope we win them, but, I hope that I'm a part of that, even in some small way; that's the goal I'm working towards. If you want to see roller derby at its best, plan on setting aside some time in November for WCR domination! And in the meantime, come see me at a home game! As a new jammer for the Manics this season, I could use some fans cheering my name."