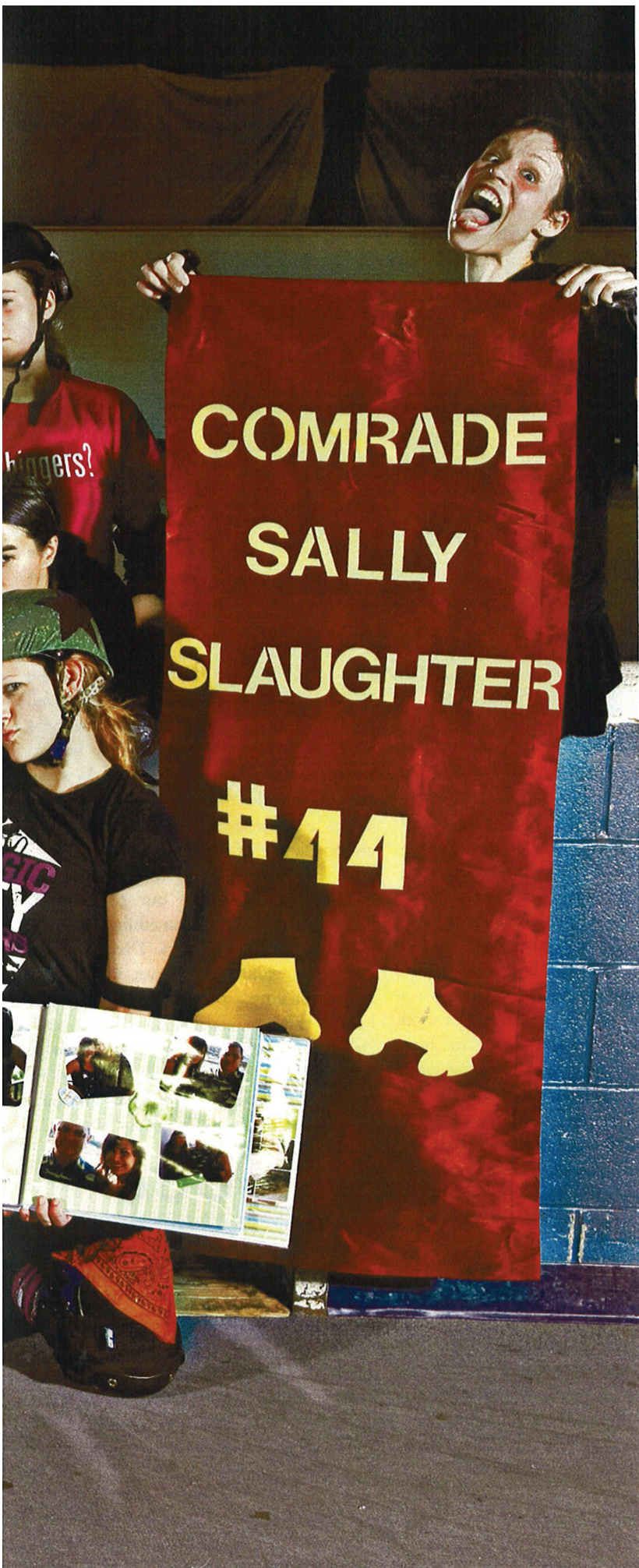


Life & Death of Roller Derby Queen

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Life and Death *of a Roller Derby Queen*

Sarah Stanfield, aka Sally Slaughter, died last year in a tragic car accident. The mayhem of a roller derby match is a fitting tribute to her big-hearted life.

*By Loyd McIntosh
Photo by Beau Gustafson*

The Tragic City Rollers display mementos from the life of Sarah Stanfield, aka Sally Slaughter. Surrounded by her daughter's teammates is Stanfield's mother, Laura.



practically immortal. It's this gonzo attitude—made up of equal parts Rosie the Riveter, '50s drive-in B-movie horror flick, and Evil Knevil-ish appetite for danger—that continues to bring fans to roller derby bouts since its inception in 1920s Chicago. The secret to the sport's longevity is this balancing act between reality and fantasy. You know the injuries and the outcomes are real, but you're left wondering if the attitude—the schtick if you will—is a put-on or completely on the level. So, what happens

It's Sunday, March 15 and the Soul City Sirens from Augusta, Ga., are in town to open the 2010 Roller Derby season with the Tragic City Rollers under the golden dome of Zamora Temple. Fans are piling in ready for a night of roller derby action, but behind the scenes emotions are running higher than normal. This isn't a normal opening night. Tonight is the first bout for TCR since founding team member and crowd favorite Sally Slaughter lost her life in an automobile accident on New Year's Eve.

Just 26 at the time of the accident, the team has waited over three agonizing months to skate in front of a crowd and to pay tribute to their friend—derby style. The bout is planned to begin with a moment of silence followed by a video presentation—a montage of photos set to the Fleetwood Mac song "Sara"—then the real action begins. "We've all gone through our phases on our own," says Voodoo Lily, another founding skater and a cousin to Sally Slaughter, "but when we're together it just makes us so much stronger,"

"It's going to be pretty somber. The girls just have to suck it up and skate," adds Lil' Miss Perfect, a relative newcomer sitting out due to a knee injury. "Most of us will just

feed off of that energy."

Coming into the season opener, the Tragic City Rollers need anything they can find to rally around. One of the most feared and respected teams in the Southeast, TCR has been on a bit of a losing streak dating back to the 2009 season, and many of the team members have been looking forward to tonight not only to remember Slaughter and pay tribute to her family, but to, hopefully, start a new winning streak. "Maybe that's what we need," says crowd favorite Schnott Nose Kid during warm ups, "to have that emotion jump in and make us more passionate and maybe we'll win one."

Moments later, the announcer addresses the crowd and the lights dim. Hands are held, heads are bowed, and a few tears are shed before the first jam is skated.

Even though the sport has changed over the years, one thing hasn't changed: the women of roller derby are tough. They have to be in order to strap on a pair of roller skates and trade elbows for a couple of hours a night. Moreover, the personas roller derby athletes develop transform them into larger-than-life, post modern, feminist anti-heroes; fierce, sexy, indestructible, and

tragedy enters the picture? How do these athletes handle the emotional pain that comes with the loss of one of your own and give the fans what they want and expect.

"That's every game, this time it just happens to be one of our girls' death, but there is always something in your personal, daily life," says Dixie Thrash. "Your job, children, whatever it is there's always something there. In this sport you have to man up, cover it up, skate it out." "It's just important that we're able to walk that line and that we know each other as people outside of here," says Voodoo Lily. "We want our fans to love us for who are; a big team with a big heart."



Sarah Stanfield, known Sally Slaughter, was on her way to visit a friend on New Year's Eve when her car skidded off the surface of Highway 280 in Inverness. Within hours, news of her death spread to her teammates, the roller derby community, and the community in general. "We didn't just lose a teammate, we lost a sister, too," says Dixie Thrash, one of the Tragic City Rollers founders and one of Slaughter's closest friends."

While Sally Slaughter was known for her tough-as-rusty-nails persona on the rink, the real Sarah was, according to friends and family, one of the kindest people they knew. It has been said that Sarah was known to not only adopt stray animals, but stray people as well. “She was so much more than roller derby,” says oldest brother Tim Stanfield. “She introduced so many people to God, and that was the most overwhelming thing to me at the funeral, how many people came up and said she impacted their lives.”

“She was non-judgmental, more than I could ever be,” says her third oldest brother, Mark Stanfield. “There was no one she couldn’t break the ice with. She was all accepting and she could be a role model to everyone. She took in a lot of people who had trouble with their families, and just kind of got them in the right direction.”

At the time of her death, Sarah had befriended a paraplegic man, helping him with basic needs, physical and spiritual. Her brother Tim remembers how her sister spent every Thanksgiving for several years serving meals at Jimmie Hale Mission. In fact, many of her friends say she tended to get too emotionally involved with people she met along the way—but that, of course, was one of the reasons she was so loved.

“She had one of the silliest, best hearts. I think that’s the best way to say it. You could honestly see how much of a giving, caring person she was, but she did it in such a beautiful, goofy manner, too,” says Thrash. “She was just a beautiful soul, to be kind of hippy about it. You could see her little chakra from miles and miles away blowing in.” “I wish I was her. She was 26 and had a lot to give to people. I’m 37 now and she was just 26,” adds Schnott Noes Kid. “She was young and vibrant and it was taken away. She had so much to give.”

To hear these descriptions, you’d think Sarah Stanfield was best-suited to be a kindergarten teacher or social worker. Sarah enjoyed watching sports—she did have three older brothers after all—but never showed much aptitude as an athlete growing up. So it came as a shock when she announced she was joining the new roller derby team and was, henceforth, to be known as Sally Slaughter. “I went crazy and said ‘no way,’” says Sarah’s mother, Laura Stanfield. “Our next door neighbor said ‘Are you kidding, she plays



roller derby? She looks like a prom queen.” “Sally Slaughter. Where does that come from?” says her brother Mark. An Auburn resident, Mark never had the opportunity to see his sister in action, and so it still seems odd to him that she was so into derby. “It was just shocking to me to hear she was doing this,” he says. “It totally took me by surprise because she bruised easily and was always hurt.”

Sarah Stanfield left all of that behind and transformed herself into Sally Slaughter becoming well-known for her physicality on the floor. Her teammates say she wasn’t afraid to throw her body around during a bout or practice, and she was fiercely loyal, the kind of person you would want to be in a foxhole with. “She was my derby wife. I have her dogtags and I have her name on my ass,” says Suge Fight, one of Sally Slaughter’s best friends and another founder of the Tragic City Rollers. Suge, who had the honor of carrying her fallen teammate’s jersey during starting lineup intros, remembers Sally as an intense and steadfast ally.

“She was very aggressive and she was very protective of the girls. Like, I have some of our teammates say if I’m jamming she’ll

go up to the other blockers and say ‘you better watch her and make sure you have her back.’”



Back to the action, the Tragic City Rollers and the Soul City Sirens battled it out in a tight one, with TCR building a large lead early in the second half. With just a little over two minutes to go, Soul City eventually pulls ahead despite the best efforts of the home team and Suge Fight in particular.

With time winding down, however, TCR was called for a handful of penalties—possibly some bad officiating as noted by several members of the team after the game—robbing the team of their chance to pull out a win. Despite the outcome, her teammates say this was the type of bout Sally Slaughter would have been excited to be a part of and they were happy so many of her fans and family were on hand.

“It really meant a whole lot to me. We really wanted to win this one,” says Voodoo Lily. “A lot of people are here tonight because they wanted to be a part of her tribute, too. We hope to see those fans for the rest of the season, but at least they were here for this tonight.” •