Anna Stevens, '09, '10 MIT, stretches as she prepares to take to the derby track during a recent practice. Stevens, aka "Ima Handful," enjoys the intensity of the sport and the sense of community and family it fosters.

“You are valued for who you are and what you bring to the family.”
—Anna Stevens, '09, '10 MIT, aka "Ima Handful"

Cruisin’ for a Bruisin’
Alumna Anna Stevens is a member of Seattle’s premier derby league, the Rat City Rollergirls
Tina Potter

You win some, you bruise some.” So goes the motto of Seattle’s premier roller derby league, the Rat City Rollergirls, who have made popular in these parts the rough-and-tumble, girl-powered sport of roller derby.

One of the Rat City girls has Seattle University roots. Matteo Ricci and College of Education grad Anna Stevens, ’09, ’10 MIT, whose derby handle is "Ima Handful," has been a member of the Rat City Rollergirls just shy of two years.

What is today
the Rat City Rollergirls began with a conversation in 2004, when a group of friends bounced around the idea of starting a Northwest league, inspired in part by the popularity of roller derby in Texas.

Although Rat City Rollergirls aren’t about roughhousing just for the sake of it, make no mistake about it—they play a physical game and are formidable competitors, among the best of the best in roller derby leagues in the country. But despite what popular culture or movies might suggest, this group "doesn’t throw elbows," Stevens is quick to add. "Although some of us do wear fishnets,” she says, alluding to another derby stereotype.

Stevens is a jammer and a blocker with the Sockit Wenches, one of four teams that skate with the Rat City Rollergirls. (The jammer typically races faster around the track than the rest of the team and is the player who scores as they earn points for passing opposing players.) The other teams that make up this flat-track derby league are Derby Liberation Front, Grave Danger and Throttle Rockets. Stevens also competes nationally as a member of the Rat City Rollergirls All Star team.
The Rat City Rollergirls consists of four teams who are part of the league. Each team practices weekly in preparation for bouts at KeyArena.

Off the rink Stevens is diminutive, with a wide, bright smile and warm personality. Once Stevens laces up the skates, pulls on the knee pads and fastens her helmet, she becomes her feisty and tough alter-ego "Ima Handful," joining a cadre that includes the likes of "Rebel Belle," "Kamikaze Kim" and "Ivana Clobber."

The physicality of roller derby is intense, and Stevens has the battle scars and stories to prove it: MRIs on both knees, acute hamstring tendonitis and bruised internal organs caused by a fierce "booty block" by another player.

The athleticism required to be a rollergirl, including weekly training sessions, was new territory for Stevens, who didn't play sports in school or consider herself athletically inclined. She had been skating for less than a year when she was selected to play for Rat City. But she says she felt accepted immediately.

"They value all skill levels and body types," she says. A few of the requirements to be a rollergirl are that you must be female and at least 21. The teams are made up of volunteers who organize and oversee all aspects of the operation.

According to the Rat City Rollergirls website, the mission of the league is "to provide athletic entertainment that improves our members’ individual athletic ability, self-discipline and character while promoting the roller derby sport."

This involves hours of training and instruction so the players can be at the top of their game in the league and in competition.

The Rat City Rollergirls do good off the track, too, through charitable work, including in the White Center neighborhood where it got its start and in the LGBT community.

Local fans can catch the Rat City Rollergirls at their home court, Key-Arena at Seattle Center, but the league’s all-star team also performs nationally and internationally. The Rat City Rollergirls play their bouts at Key-Arena after previously holding court at the hangar at Sand Point Naval Air Station. Their fans, known as the Rat Pack, are a fervent, feverish bunch who come out in droves to cheer on the home team.