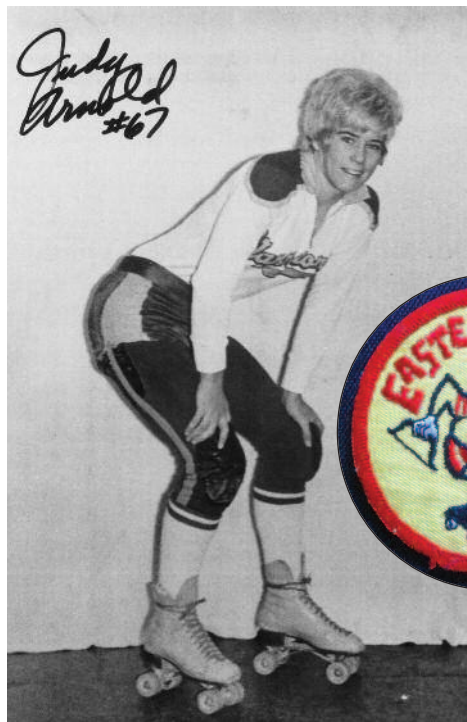


I may not know Karate, but I know crazy and I'm not afraid to use it.

Back In Time

By Will Valentino



An autographed Judy Arnold photo when she skated for the Warriors in the late 60s.

NOSTALGIA ON WHEELS

Those who may remember the “Eastern Warriors” may not know just how they happened to become Philadelphia’s Roller derby team. In 1967, The Warriors were a team on the move, relocating from the tropical paradise of Hawaii, far east to Philadelphia looking for new fans and a market share of the burgeoning popularity of roller derby. The sport had a stop and go success since the late 1940’s when the Philadelphia Panthers competed in national leagues. What began as a straight laced sport in Chicago in 1935 based on endurance, soon morphed into something completely different and far more entertaining. During the turbulent 1960’s, colorful personalities, theatrics, match games, grudge matches and flying fists brought the game into a whole new arena. In the Warriors case, the team captured the attention of many Philadelphians looking to cheer on a winning team. The 70s had been lean and mean with championships few and far between for most professional Philly sports teams. Something clicked with this team captained by a feisty blonde named Judy Arnold! Kids like to read comic books, but to some, these rag tag warriors on wheels had been superheroes in their own right. Fans began to frequent the games held at the Philadelphia Arena and later the Spectrum. Often the team would be featured on “The Roller Game of the Week” on WKBS TV Channel 48 and soon, watching those bright red, yellow and white uniforms sandwiched between mail order commercials for KTEL records and Ginsu knives became a weekend ritual for many. There was a visceral thrill watching the Warriors glide, roll and punch their way to victory over the likes of Judy Sowinski and the New York Bombers. Sowinski would eventually become a Warrior herself and a South Philly resident to boot! Elmer Anderson gave the play-by-play often interviewing team members only to start ducking punches as players tore at each other’s uniforms, throwing chairs and threatening match races with high stakes. The game had become a new age gladiatorial match on wheels and the Philadelphia fans ate it up! To understand the game, you must first understand how the game was played. The game was based on point scores and preventing the opposing team’s lead “jammer” from reaching the front of the pack. Imagine if you will, football, on wheels, on a banked, ever circling oval field where the lead “jammer” has to break through the opposing teams defenses to get to the front of the pack to score within a set time limit. Talk about a blast from the past, Mike Douglas, who once did a nationally syndicated talk show from Philadelphia called the sport a “cross between the circus, hockey and wrestling and he wasn’t that far from the truth. To give you an idea of how popular the sport had become, in 1972 Douglas had an open air roller rink built on Independence Mall outside the KYW studios at 5th and Market and featured Judy Arnold and members of the Eastern Warriors in a match game against Chess Champ Bobby Riggs! I found the whole segment on YouTube! In their heyday, 16,000 people would fill the Spectrum to watch the Warriors roll to victory, drawing more than the fledgling Flyers! Perhaps it was the Warriors who taught the soon to be renegade “Broad Street Bullies” how to throw a punch and draw a crowd! At the end of the day it was the pure entertainment value of the sport that kept people watching and attending the games.

Next Month in “Back In Time,” we will visit and catch up with Judy Arnold, the original “Blonde Bomber” in the flesh and remember those crazy days when the Spectrum was known as “Judy’s Place” and the roller games were the hottest sport in the City Of Brotherly Love!

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, the roller derby was synonymous with everything hip, modern, and far out in popular culture. During this time, the sport reached its pinnacle of popularity after humble beginnings in the mid 1930’s. If you lived in the Delaware Valley during this time, the chances were good you had a few heroes on roller skates that became local legends and are fondly remembered today.

One of those heroes was Judy Arnold, a San Francisco native, who along with the likes of Jim “The King” Trotter, Ruberta Mitchell, Little Richard Brown and Buddy Atkinson Jr. became the heart and soul of the Philadelphia “Eastern Warriors.” Now I am sure there are a few *Back in Time* readers who remember the Roller Games, and if not, then get ready for a blast from the past!

MORE TO EXPLORE: For more memories: check out the Philadelphia Warriors Facebook page and JudyArnoldSkater.com. You can also check out YOUTUBE.com for plenty of video of roller games past!

We all have baggage, find someone who loves you enough to help you unpack.

Back In Time

By Will Valentino



“THE QUEEN OF THE ROLLER DERBY”

PART 2 OF OUR NOSTALGIC LOOK AT THE ROLLER DERBY CRAZE OF THE 1970'S

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, the roller derby was synonymous with everything hip, modern, and far out in popular culture. During this time, the sport reached its pinnacle of popularity after humble beginnings in the mid 1930's. If you lived in the Delaware Valley during this time, the chances were good you had a few heroes on roller skates that became local legends and are fondly remembered today. One of those heroes was Judy Arnold, a San Francisco native who, along with the likes of Jim “The King” Trotter, Ruberta Mitchell, Little Richard Brown and Buddy Atkinson Jr. became the heart and soul of the Philadelphia “Eastern” Warriors. Now I am sure there are a few “Back in Time” readers who remember the Roller Games and, if not, then get ready to roll with a blast from the past!

Indisputably, at the heart of the popularity of the Warriors was its energetic, rabble-rousing captain, the indomitable Judy Arnold. In the 70s, Arnold, was about as strong of a female role model you would ever hope to find on television and beyond. She literally was Barbarella on skates!

Last year, I had the pleasure of sitting down with Judy Arnold, the fiery blonde Captain of the Eastern Warriors at a recent event. The event was held, strangely enough at the Ontario Street Comic Book Shop in the Port Richmond section of the Philadelphia where I discovered what is past is certainly not forgotten! The Comic book shop is also famous for a movie scene with Samuel Jackson shot for M. Night Shyamalan’s “Unbreakable” movie. Ironically, Arnold was no stranger to Hollywood having been asked to skate as Raquel Welch’s stunt double in the 1972 movie “Kansas City Bomber,” a movie about the cut-throat roller derby business she had successfully navigated to become one of the league’s biggest stars. So the Comic book shop seemed to be an appropriate place to meet one of my own superheroes! Amazingly, after all these years, it was no surprise to find Judy’s faithful fans coming out to share a few stories with the “Queen of the Roller Derby!” Judy clearly still has the sparkle in her eye that won her all those fans years ago, throwing hugs instead of punches and greeting old friends like it was a family reunion. Robin Appiott was there with her daughter to catch up and hang out. Robin told me, when she was a little girl, Judy would carry her in her arms when she skated around the track during team rehearsals when the team would play the old Philadelphia Arena at 46th and Market Streets. 45 years later, Robin and Judy remain friends to this day, a friendship that began on a banked roller rink track when she was only three years

old! Judy told me that when she skated for the Warriors she lived in South Jersey in the Voorhees area. Looking through some old photos, we started to reminisce about her days when she wore the warrior’s uniform. One of her fondest memories was skating into the Spectrum (which she reminded me was known in the roller derby world as “Judy’s



The Ultimate Warrior: Judy Arnold at The Ontario Comic Book shop in Philadelphia last year. (Photo by Will Valentino).

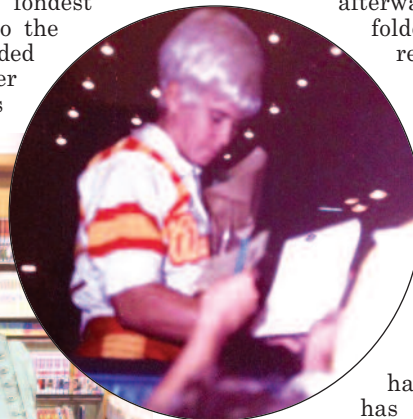


Rollerballers of the New Age: Chelsea Kryder (2nd from left) and fellow Penn Jersey teammates. (Photo by Will Valentino).

Place”) to a crowd of 12,000 fans cheering her name over and over again...JUDY...JUDY...JUDY!!! It was a defining moment between her and the fans. She added, “The one thing I’m so grateful for were the demonstrative fans in the Tri-State area who stood with us in our wins and losses. Their energy and encouragement made me a better skater, and I am forever grateful for each one of

them.”

Judy Arnold walked away from the game in August of 1975 after 15 years as a legendary professional skater and enrolled in theology school. The Warriors played their last game not too long afterwards after the league folded and attempts to reorganize it failed. It was the end of an era.



A young Judy Arnold signs autographs for fans before the October 1969 Season opener at the Philadelphia Arena.

The Warriors faded away into history but the memories will always remain, at least until the generation who cheered them on rolls off into the sunset.....or so I thought.

In recent years, I have discovered there has been a revival of interest in the sport! It’s a revival that is beginning to gain some momentum according to Chelsea Kryder, a bright eyed young woman of 26 years who is the modern day embodiment of a young Judy Arnold at the top of her game. Chelsea who goes by the name “Chel Shock” skates with the Penn Jersey “She Devils.” The travelling team competes nationally and is a part of the “Penn Jersey Roller Derby” organization, a 10 year old group of skaters who are dedicated to keeping the spirit of the game alive, on their own time and money. Chelsea, who has been skating with the PJRL for two and a half years, told me the games were “a chance to connect with people.” She first met Judy Arnold at a Roller Derby Hall of Fame event held in at the PJRD’s own rink. She agreed legendary players like Judy remain an inspiration to this new generation of skaters. I don’t doubt Chelsea and her team mates will continue to recreate and revitalize the game and place their own unique stamp on it with a nod to the past. Check out the PJRD website and make plans to attend a game!

As for Judy Arnold, her message and journey from a clenched fist to an open hand is one positive journey worth paying forward here. Judy left the game to attend theology school and is now a minister who travels the country giving inspirational talks and telling her story, often rolling into a church on her skates and old “warriors” uniform. Her story is transcendental and it’s a journey which continues to inspire the next generation who “roll” in her footsteps, both on the roller rink and off.

MORE TO EXPLORE: Check out the “Philadelphia Warriors” Facebook page and JudyArnoldSkater.com to go “Back In Time” with Judy Arnold and more memories about the Roller Derby craze of the 1970’s!