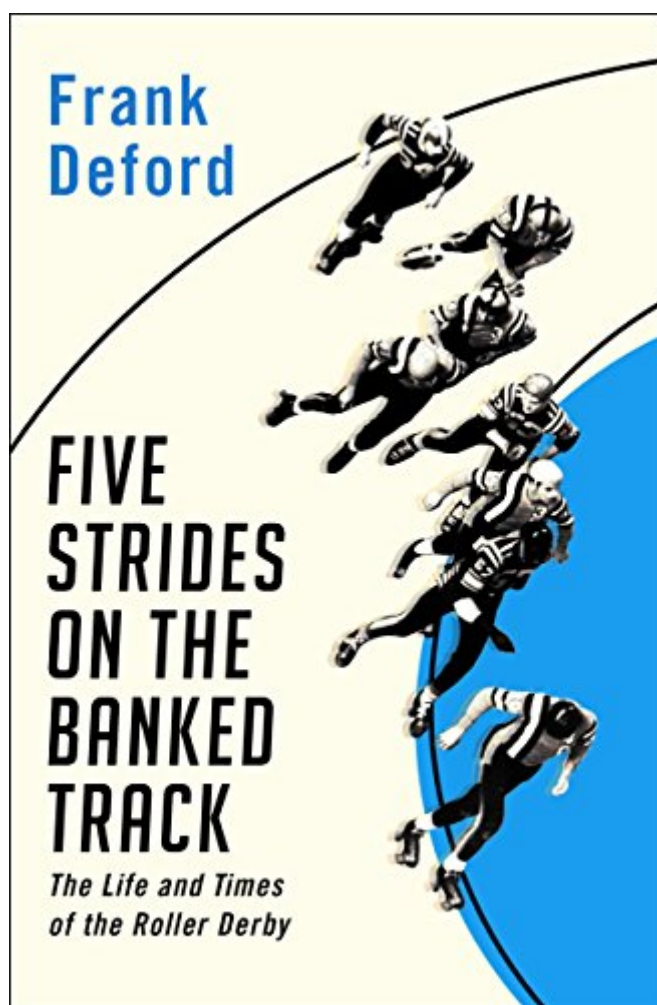


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# Five Strides On The Banked Track: The Life And Times Of The Roller Derby



## Synopsis

Illustrated with photographs by Walter looss Jr.: Iconic sportswriter and commentator Frank Deford's first book brings to life one of America's most thrilling and misunderstood sports entertainments, the Roller Derby, from its birth during the Great Depression to its second ascendancy in the late 1960s. In *Five Strides on the Banked Track*, distinguished sports journalist Frank Deford opens a fascinating window on this exhilarating entertainment that operates according to its own set of unique rules both on and off the track. The Derby began as an idea on a tablecloth in 1935 by Leo Seltzer. From its Great Depression roots when young skaters would run away to join the Roller Derby in the same way one might run away to join the circus through its prewar heyday, postwar decline, and ultimate rise to superstardom in the 1960s, Deford sweeps us along on an unforgettable journey. He brings together the players, the fans, the promoters, and the celebrities. He shares the exploits of Bay Bomber legend Charlie O'Connell, superstar Joanie Weston, and beloved villain Ann Calvello, with her dyed blue hair, who would ultimately go on to compete in Roller Derby in seven separate decades. Deford vividly captures the excitement of a sport Variety called "cathartic, dramatic, fast-paced, and classic as a John Wayne movie." From the idolatry of the fans to the loneliness of the open road to the hard-charging frenzy of the arena, this is a rare glimpse into a uniquely American spectator sport that continues to reinvent and resurrect itself today. This definitive new edition includes a foreword by Jerry Seltzer and an introduction by Frank Deford.

## Book Information

File Size: 3836 KB

Print Length: 211 pages

Publisher: Open Road Media (April 8, 2014)

Publication Date: April 8, 2014

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00J2IK61Y

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #460,237 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #3

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Sports > Individual Sports > Rollerskating &

Rollerblading #9 in Kindle Store > Books > Sports & Outdoors > Individual Sports > Rollerskating &

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## Customer Reviews

Another great story by Frank Deford! Brought me back to the days of black and white (and early color) TV, and gracefully told the stories of the Derby heroes we used to watch Saturday mornings. Enjoyed reading about the lives behind the games, and brought a bit of closure to the heroes and villains we cheered for and hollered at!

Great history and stories. A sport that I knew little of, this filled me in on how things work. Glad to get it on Kindle. Glad a great reporter like Frank DeFord took the time to write this book.

Very little has been written about Roller Derby's 'Golden Age' of the Sixties, so it was a pleasure to get a glimpse of it through this book

Brought back great memories

I've started reading this book. Great work by Frank Deford!

Rating: 4.5 of 5 stars (outstanding) Review: When I found out that a book on the Roller Derby was going to be offered by NetGalley, I was very happy. To find out it was written by Frank Deford, one of the most prominent sports writers and a member of the National Sports Writers Hall of Fame, well, that just made it even better. The book did not disappoint as it was a well written, fascinating look at history and players, both male and female, of the Roller Derby. Many people over 50 will recall when Roller Derby was a staple on television, several nights a week in some places. It was part sport, part show, but always entertaining. The sport was developed in 1935 by Leo Seltzer, initially as a skating endurance contest. It later included contact thanks to a suggestion by legendary sportswriter Damon Runyan. The sport took off from there, becoming a spectacle that would have

troubles during World War II and then take off when television helped beam it into households. Deford weaves the history of the sport into stories about the lifestyle of Roller Derby skaters. It is a unique lifestyle that can harden people and they seemed to form their own convent. It was common for skaters to become romantically involved and get married while on the road. Some of the stories are inspiring, some are somewhat sad, but all of them paint a picture about what the life of a Roller Derby skater is like. The only drawback of the book is that there is no update on what became of the skaters Deford portrayed in the book. Since the book has been re-released as an e-book, that information would have been a nice touch to let fans who watched these skaters know what happened to them. Deford's writing makes the reader really connect with these performers as they are really just regular men and women who were eking out a living on the "banked track" as was commonly stated. One big difference between these athletes and those of today is there is a lot of junk food eaten by the skaters as they are on the road, and nearly every one of them smoked cigarettes. Can you imagine LeBron James or Russell Wilson lighting one up as soon as they hit the locker room? Overall, this is a very good book for readers who have never had the chance to enjoy Deford's writing, for readers who remember the spectacle that was the Roller Derby, or for those who just enjoy human interest stories. I wish to thank NetGalley for providing a copy of the book in exchange for an honest review.

Did I skim? No  
Pace of the book: Very good, as the history of Roller Derby is told in a brief but complete manner. The stories and interviews with the players are interesting and humorous as well as a little poignant.  
Do I recommend? Yes, whether the reader is old enough to remember when Roller Derby was a television staple or not. The book is an interesting look at the past with some lessons and observations that are still relevant more than 40 years later.

I read about Roller Derby in Frank Deford's previous book 'Over Time'. If you have heard his commentary on NPR, you can't help but read the book in his tone. 'The Roller derby prospers, rocking and whirring, exciting its own, nurturing its young. It was designed on a tablecloth..' Deford's writing technique moves with contrasting images of high activity and a tablecloth. Like Meads' study on Samoans, Hemingway's on Bull fighting, this will be the last word on Roller Derby.

Deford writing about the roller derby! What could be better? Well actually, this book from 1971 never quite takes off. The portraits of the stars I remember from my childhood are good, and paint them as real people who just happen to make a living skating, but the very normality of these folks makes the book more interesting than it is entertaining. A little more perspective on what became of

everyone after the end of the book would have made this much more interesting. Still, Open Road Media deserves a lot of praise for resurrecting this never-reprinted look at a peculiar corner of American sports.

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