

we are orlando, on three

QUENBY SHEREE, ORLANDO DERBY GIRLS
PHOTOS BY QUENBY SHEREE

On June 12th an act of violence rocked the city of Orlando. Word of the mass shooting at the cities' popular club, Pulse, spread across the world like a shared heartbeat. That same night the Orlando home team played against Sintral Florida Derby Demons (based in Daytona Beach). Heather Kinkade, a.k.a Foxy Bloxy, the President of the Orlando Psycho City Derby Girls, was one of many scrambling to locate her friends and teammates after the news.

"For many of us, our Orlando derby family is our support system. There were excruciating moments spent holding my breath when we couldn't find a few members of our family, trying to balance the fear of the unknown and the urgent need to use our resources to find them. These are my people, and confirming that they were safe was my first priority. I don't have words to really describe how I felt knowing they were all safe."

Shock of the event was still prevalent as Foxy Bloxy and the rest of the team debated taking a knee or show up to their game. In the end the option was clear.

"The choice to play our game was about bringing our community together to support each other in a tragic time and standing strong for our city and the LGBTQ community... We wanted to stand strong for Orlando. We wanted to provide a safe space for our community to come together. We wanted to use the game to raise funds and donate them to The LGBT Center of Central Florida's support efforts. We wanted to live every part of our traditional pre-game chant "WE ARE ORLANDO."

There were two moments of silence for the victims and that of their families during the game. Spectators, volunteers, players, and refs, stood with hands clasped as the soft ringings and clatter of the arcade games along with the quiet chatter of children too young to understand grief reminded us all that life continues in fragility. An act of violence cannot make the world stop- could not even damper the spirits of everyone in the rink.

Both teams wore rainbow ribbons in support of the victims; 49 at the time of this writing and many more with critical injuries. Their venue, Semoran Skateway, was kind





enough to discount the team's rate that night to allow them to donate more to the LGBT Center. In another show of generosity, the winner of that night's 50/50 raffle donated their winnings to the LGBT center.

Orlando's team had an emotional huddle where Melissa Mays, aka Mykillangelo, as the Travel Team Co-Captain, took on the task of pumping up her team from the distraction of the day's chaos and uncertainty. The theme, like derby itself, was strength and unity.

The moment was solemn and private, ending on a note of determination.

"...Today we will turn our grief into strength and our anger into action. We won't let this tragedy define us. We are Orlando. We are beautiful, we are strong, we are Orlando. Today is the day we show the world Orlando won't be shaken so easily. Today is the day we stand strong and fight for the ones we love. And today we make a better tomorrow for our city.

We are Orlando, on three."

As she spoke, eyes brimmed with tears that never fell. Not here, not before this game. Because derby isn't about falling,

it's about getting back up. Sometimes when you get hit especially hard, when players and onlookers aren't sure if you will be taken out of the game, we take a knee. We wait. A player is checked head to toe. Where does it hurt? Can you bend your wrist? There is silence as we wait; and injured or not- the player is helped up. They glide off the court to join in the game again or they hobble off to have their broken bones mended, their bruises iced. Either way the crowd stands with them and cheers.

This isn't NASCAR, where people show up to see a fiery crash, this is derby. We come to see our girlfriends, sisters, friends, mothers stand back up after taking a hard hit to the ground. We come to see the opposing team cheering for their strength just as hard as they are cheering for their own teammates.

Foxy Bloxy played in that game on June 12th. She states, "As a skater, I wear "ORLANDO" across my chest every time I play for our travel team. I've always been proud of that, it's always meant a lot to me. Putting it on Sunday I felt a different weight in wearing that uniform. I was wearing it in defense, support, memory and defiance."





Two Florida teams battled and Orlando lead a significant victory over Sintral's Daytona Beach team. It was hard won and well earned. In the final jam, players crashed into each other punctuated by claps of thunder as a fierce summer storm raged outside of the skating rink, loud and ferocious as the anger felt across the nation.

Foxy Bloxy goes on to point out, "The win wasn't what mattered most, the fact that we continued to proudly be who we are and not be controlled by anyone or anything is what defined that game.

As a league we're coping through action and service. We're still actively working to support relief efforts for victims, families and the community."

After awards were given and the space cleaned up, players and officials stood under the eave of the rink laughing over the tropical storm that might scare the pants off tourists, but Florida locals are well used to. Some stayed to shout conversation over the wind and rain, others ran back and

forth to their cars with gear, grinning from ear to ear at the absolute uselessness of a bag or helmet held up to stop the torrent from a Florida Baptism. Visitors to our state sometimes look to these seasonal storms and shake their head in wonder, "It's a nice place to visit, but you have to be crazy to live here." Crazy helps. You have to be crazy to paint yourself up and literally throw your best friends into a group of blockers, crazy to hug and party with a woman that just an hour before knocked you to the ground so hard you were sucking air and mentally checking if anything felt broken.

A mother with her young daughter gets ready to race to their minivan, both exhilarated. Their hands grip each other's as the mom looks both ways to make sure their path is clear. I can't hear them over the storm, but as they hesitate and smile I can imagine the woman counting down to prepare themselves for the immediate shock of being soaked on the first step. "Ok, on three! One, two..."★