

The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



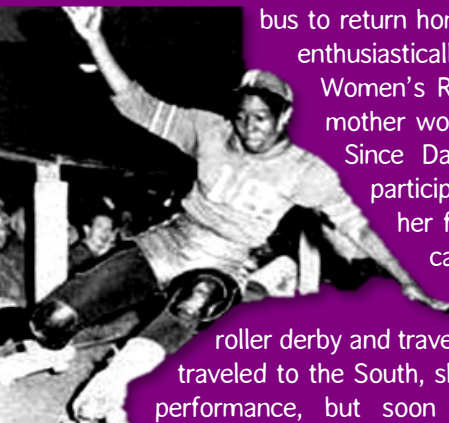
Darlene Anderson (March 19, 1939 -)

"First Black Woman Professional Roller Derby Skater"

Darlene Anderson was born in Pasadena California on March 19, 1939. Darlene was the youngest child, growing up with three older brothers. With her brothers as playmates, Darlene became a skilled athlete, excelling in sports. When Darlene begged her parents to allow her to try out for the high school baseball team, her mother was adamantly opposed. Her mother thought the sport was too rough for Darlene, and encouraged her to take up a safer sport - such as ice skating. Darlene reluctantly complied, and quickly became a skilled skater. During her junior high years, several of Darlene's white girlfriends talked about an underground sport called "Roller Derby".

In high school, Darlene met sisters, Ann and Marion George. The three became friends and when Darlene learned that Ann and Marion were planning to go to a roller derby, Darlene asked to join them. Without their parent's permission, the girls joined roller derby classes together. They attended a couple of classes before their mothers found out and forbade them from returning. Shortly after, Darlene reconnected with Joanne, one of her junior high school friends that previously mentioned the sport of roller derby. When Darlene told her about the classes she had recently attended, the girls devised a plan to get Darlene back to class; Darlene would stay the night at Joanne's house on Friday night and Saturday mornings they would take busses and trolleys from Pasadena to Los Angeles to attend classes. Darlene covered for her 6-hour absence by telling her mother that they were simply spending the day "ice skating" as her mother had previously suggested. After practice, the duo would go to the Olympic Auditorium to watch the games. And after 8 months Darlene was put on a team, skating during halftime at The Olympic Auditorium.

Just before her 17th birthday, Darlene and her friends snuck out to attend the timed tryouts for the Thunderbirds and the Red Devils Women's Roller Derby Teams. After the long day of trials, Darlene headed for the bus to return home, before her curfew. Before she stepped onto the bus, her friends enthusiastically informed her that her name had been called by the Red Devils Women's Roller Derby Team. Instead of excitement, Darlene worried that her mother would discover that she was lying just to attend roller derby practice.

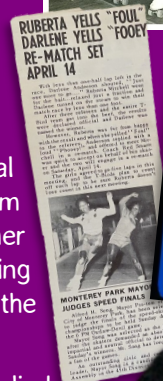
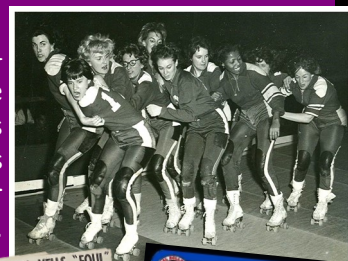


Since Darlene was a minor, she needed her parent's permission to participate. Darlene confessed and although her mother was opposed, her father gave his blessing for her to join the team. Her mother became her biggest fan.

Darlene went to New York and began training for professional roller derby and traveled everywhere with the team, except for the South. When her team traveled to the South, she would be sent home. At first, Darlene thought it because of her performance, but soon realized it was a safety measure to keep her from being exposed to the harsh racism and discrimination other black athletes faced in the South.

Although Darlene struggled with being "the first black roller derby skater", she relied on her family and her faith to guide her through the more stressful times. By the age of 19, Darlene was crowned "Rookie of the Year." She accepted the honor of breaking the barrier for the next young black girl dreaming of being a roller derby skater.

In addition to The Brooklyn Red Devils, Lucy skated with The Hawaii All Stars, The San Francisco Bay Bombers, The New York Chiefs, and The Los Angeles Braves... to name a few. She retired from skating in her early 30's, and took a job working at the race track, where she once again became a first; the first black woman to be a Pari-Mutuel Clerk with the Southern California Racing Association. In fact, she was one of the first five women to be hired by the Southern California Racing Association at the time. Darlene currently lives in Pasadena, California.



NEW YORK CHIEFS
1959
Front Row (left to right): Dru Scott, Jo Ruffino, Gloria Nash, Darlene Anderson, Judy McGraw, May Hansen and Gerry Murray. Back Row: Coach Buddy Atkinson, Jr., Buddy Atkinson, Jr., Neil Willis, Billy Gardner, Sam Marchese, Mike Gammann, Pete Mangano and Gene Gammann.

