

The Not-So-Secret Life of “Lawless Lizzie”: Elizabeth Valandingham '02, Roller Derby Champ

By Edie Sachs

Watching her flying around the track in fishnets and a miniskirt, long blond hair spilling from under her helmet, you might not guess that “Lawless Lizzie” is actually a very law-abiding citizen. In fact, this fearless competitor in women’s flat track roller derby is a lawyer—one who just made partner at the Morristown, New Jersey-based firm of O’Donnell McCord & DeMarzo, PC.

“Lawless Lizzie” is the *nom de derby* of Elizabeth Valandingham '02, who started skating with the Morristown Madams team in 2007.

“One evening, I was in Morristown with a few friends at a restaurant which was located around the corner from a local roller rink,” Valandingham recalls, “and our waitress, who just happened to be the team captain of the Madams, said, ‘Hey, you should go check out the roller derby tonight.’ So I did—and I fell in love.”

Valandingham had never been on skates before in her life. But the skaters were very welcoming and happy to teach her the skills she needed to join the team. The sport requires new members to pass various skills tests in areas such as jumping, blocking, and skating with speed before they can compete.

Competitions are called “bouts,” and each bout is divided up into short periods called “jams.” During a jam, a team’s “jammer” must try to score points by passing as many of the opposing team’s skaters as possible. In the process, “pivots” and “blockers” skate defensively and try to keep the other team’s jammer from passing them. Valandingham is a blocker for her team.

Is roller derby a dangerous sport? “There are regulations pertaining to the types of physical contact permitted between skaters, but you can definitely get hurt,” says Valandingham, who hasn’t sustained any serious injuries to date. “It’s a fast-paced, full-contact sport that is very athletic and competitive.” It also promotes a great deal of loyalty and trust among teammates.

Valandingham characterizes roller derby as a family-friendly sport that donates a portion of the proceeds of bouts to local charitable organizations. As a result, bouts are often attended by local dignitaries and politicians, which has had the added benefit for Valandingham of furthering her career.

“I’ve been able to meet a lot of influential people who find themselves intrigued and impressed by my ‘alternate lifestyle.’ And clients have told me that they have more confidence in me as an attorney because of roller derby.”

The sport also enables her to keep up with New York Law School classmates who come to her bouts. “It’s been valuable in helping me stay connected with other alumni,” she says.

At her firm, Valandingham focuses on real estate, tax, municipal, and land use law. She handles property tax appeals, represents town planning boards, and functions as the town attorney for various municipalities. She also serves as the public defender for the town of West Caldwell, New Jersey.

Recently, Valandingham used her legal expertise to establish a new women’s roller derby league called the Jerzey Derby Brigade. The new league consists of two teams: the Corporal Punishers, which absorbed a majority of the skaters from the now-retired Morristown Madams; and a “B” team called the Major Pains, which is for skaters who are less experienced and/or want to participate recreationally rather than competitively. Valandingham is considering additional options for the league, possibly including a noncontact competitive team and a kids’ team.

“This is an up-and-coming sport, and I’m trying to get the word out to anyone who might be interested in participating,” she says. “You don’t even have to get on skates to get involved. Fund-raising, marketing, contracts, licensing—there’s so much to do.”

