



Recommendations on Mixed Level Play

This guide will provide coaches, trainers and leagues with guidance on integrating new players into league scrimmage, with a specific focus on facilitating mixed level play.

It is important to recognize that one size does not fit all. Individual leagues all have different skill levels, progression pathways, and numbers of skaters and officials to manage.

This guide will cover:

- Defining mixed level play and safety considerations for mixed level scrimmage
- Adjusting scrimmage parameters to allow for safe mixed level play
- Identifying the point at which to integrate your new players into your league scrimmage
- Working with officials to customize scrimmages and setting officiating focus.

The guidance can also be applied to your approach for integrating skaters into drills.



What do we mean by mixed level play?

Mixed level play is when skaters play or train the game at different levels. When integrating new players into league scrimmage, this will create a mixed level play situation.

Mixed level play is not inherently unsafe.

However, safety awareness should move to the forefront when there are gaps and mismatches in a players' abilities.

You can establish a skill level spectrum in relation to skating, game play and rules knowledge by reviewing the following for each area.

- **Complexity** of strategies and game play
- **Force** of contact, hits and drives
- **Speed** of gameplay (incl. skating, strategy, decision making etc.)¹

If the skill range is widespread, we are talking about mixed skill levels.

¹ Refer to THIS IS ROLLER DERBY curriculum for a more detailed explanation of these key elements.

When are players ready to join full league scrimmage?

The “THIS IS ROLLER DERBY” curriculum design is intended to facilitate the integration of new players by focussing on teaching gameplay and complex movements as well as standalone skating skills.

Just because skaters are playing full contact WFTDA rules with their peers does not mean they are ready to safely engage in league scrimmage².

Readiness is not about if a skater is safe in general, but if they are able and safe in relation to OTHERS based around the above mentioned parameters of speed, force and complexity.

The suggested approach is to develop gameplay and skills by playing roller derby with peers or players of similar skill and progressions together.

It is a league’s responsibility to ensure that when bringing new players into league scrimmage, they have assessed the safety considerations.

- Analyze league or specific team game play - focus should be on SAFETY in relation to complexity, force, and speed.
- Adjust the appropriate parameters
- Agree on the changes with the officials
- Communicate clearly what the focus and goal is for all participants in the drill/scrimmage

Consider this!

No skater should be consistently excluded from play due to their skill level.

Consider this!

Analysis and communication should be positive and in relation to the higher end of the skill spectrum, e.g., “how quickly is the game moving” instead of “is this person able to keep up”.

Supporting mixed level play:

There are often situations where we have to run a training scrimmage with mixed levels.

Mixed level play can happen in:

Land Derby
Minimal Contact Derby
Stop and Contact Derby
Full Contact Derby

² This will be dependent on individual league skill level and scrimmage structure.

Safety is our first priority. Coaches should assess the participants and make adjustments to the speed, complexity, and/or force as needed.

Make sure you communicate your focus and needs for adjusting scrimmage to Officials early enough, so these adjustments can be integrated with their own development. For example, redefining the pack as the back can be used for training out of play calls, while adjusting contact levels might mean a focus on multiplayer blocks, forearms or backblocks.

There are a number of ways to do this: **change the game, set a focus, or adjust the game parameters.** Here are some ideas:

Change the game	Set a focus	Adjust the game parameters
Play at the game level of your lowest skilled skater.	Coaching on track (advanced skaters are giving directions, but not executing them)	
Redefine the pack : pack is always in the back to adjust speed for slower skaters.	Limit full contact (advanced skaters are only allowed to positionally block, advanced Jammers can only pass by lateral/diagonal movements etc.)	Set parameters for either individual skaters and modify complexity (eg. advanced skaters are allowed to only positional block or not allowed to block while backward facing, advanced Jammers can only pass by lateral/diagonal movements)
Set up a non-regulation training scrimmage where you have unlimited time outs	Allow for unlimited time outs and take additional time to explain rules or strategies	Adjust the clock and give 1 min breaks in between jams, do only 1 min jams or only do 20 min half times.
	Run directed scrimmage with controlled scenarios.	If you have specific team packs play each other, substitute out of the box
	Team Jammer swap - place less experienced jammers with higher level blockers and more experienced jammers with the newer blockers	

Organizing mixed scrimmages:

Mixed level scrimmage and new skater debuts are a key part of derby culture and training.

When organizing a scrimmage where you are not familiar with the skill level of participating players, you could:

- a) Send a Development Map Overview which allows you to indicate expectations for players' skill level.
- b) Ask where they are on the IEDP development pathway.
- c) Refer them to the safe skills for playing roller derby in the Risk Management Guidelines.³



³ The resources mentioned here are available at WFTDA.com