

“Think of the difference between a team sport and one that you do by yourself. Like it or not, if you’re by yourself, you’re going to be faced with a lot more of your own doubts and your own drawbacks and your own whatever.”

— Campbell Scott

I watched some of the Winter Olympics last month, but to be honest, very little of it interested me. How much more exciting would speed skating be if it were done the same way as roller derby? The goal would be the same – to cross the finish line before your opponents do – but if your teammates could trip other players or knock them into the stands, wouldn’t that be worth watching? Or if your friends could link arms and “crack the whip”, propelling you ahead of your rivals, wouldn’t that inspire young children to want to grow up to be just like you? Instead, most of the competitions are just about whether somebody can slide on ice a millisecond faster than somebody else or can jump in the air and land without falling down. Boring.

The same can be said for beekeeping. Although the stereotypical image of a beekeeper is a hermit living in a secluded shack in the woods, our hobby is much more interesting and rewarding when it is conducted as a team sport. Fortunately for us in North Carolina, there are literally tens of thousands of beekeepers running around, most whom are eager to help others as well as learn from them. Eighty-two NCSBA chapters cover the vast majority of NC’s 100 counties, with some being served by more than one county and a few covering several counties together.

How is cooperation and collaboration helpful? A few examples are:

1. Chapters often conduct bee schools which not only benefit beginners but provide refreshers for old timers.
2. Chapters typically present speakers who share helpful and interesting information.
3. I’ve picked up nucs for bee buddies who were out of town on delivery day.
4. I’ve provided queens to bee buddies who needed them.



As an example of collaborative teamwork that beekeepers can benefit from, roller derby is much better than speed skating. Have you helped a bee buddy cripple their pest problem lately?

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5. I’ve provided swarms to beekeepers just starting out.
6. I’ve loaned swarm-catching equipment to fellow club members (see “[Let’s make a bee vac!](#)”).
7. Bee buddies often help each other with tasks such as applying Varroa mite treatments, sharing both equipment and expertise.
8. Comparing notes on pest problems, honey yields, weather issues etc. can either reassure you or spur you to take action regarding your own situation.
9. A helping hand or a second opinion are often all that stands between success and disappointment.

In addition, making friends with fellow beekeepers is a great way to influence whether your neighbors raise Mite Bombs that can pollute your own colonies (see “[Have You Been Bombed?](#)”). Honey bees fly for miles surrounding your apiary and share pests and diseases freely with other bees that they encounter while foraging, drifting and robbing. You may not be a social creature but your bees certainly are. Wouldn’t you like to know who is the “parent” of the “kids” your darling bees are hanging out with? Do they share your convictions regarding Good Beekeeping Practices, especially what constitutes effective

and appropriate pest management? Are they a major part of the problem or partners toward the solution?

I once chatted with a woman who told me, "Beekeepers are such wonderful people! I've never met one who wasn't just the nicest person ever." I bit my tongue to keep from telling her, "Lady, if you want to meet cranky, self-centered, obnoxious beekeepers, I'll make you a list!" For me, this is another reason to befriend and work with fellow beekeepers: there are jerks out there who would disillusion, discourage and misinform people if they didn't have good folks setting the proper example. Don't let the nasty people dominate the scene – proactively create the collaborative environment that you and others like you deserve.

March is the ideal time to put this plan into action. We are flooded with brand-new, first-time hobbyists who need guidance. If you are one of them, you will blend in nicely at your first bee club meeting. If you are one of those who can give experienced-based guidance, or at least sympathy, you are truly needed. Go to a local club meeting and offer to accompany a newcomer as they install their first package, even if you are a newcomer yourself.

Fun multiplies as more people participate together. If we aren't doing this for fun, then why would we do it?

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Isn't it a lot more enjoyable to say, "Hey! Look at this!" when you have an audience? Attend your local bee club and take part in the fun.