

Assignment 2: Reflective Piece

Sky Brown- Teenage Skateboarding Prodigy

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Sky Brown, at the age of 13, has become the youngest member of an Olympic skateboarding team, as well as one of the youngest females to ever compete in the Olympics. Competing at the Tokyo Olympics for Great Britain, she was the youngest athlete in the past eighty years to compete, and took home a bronze medal in park skateboarding. This massive accomplishment was almost inevitable for the young prodigy, as she has made appearances in two X Games, the first at age 11, and the second at age 13 where she won Gold. Her interview in July of 2021 with The Guardian outlines the incredible life of this talented teen. Her heart is in inspiring other young girls to follow their dreams, no matter how impossible they may seem. She tells reporters “I hope I can inspire some girls by being the smallest one in there; hopefully, they’ll be like, ‘Oh, I can do it, too!’ *That’s* why I want to be in the Olympics.”¹

Described as “one of the best female skaters ever, if not one of the best well-rounded skaters ever, regardless of gender”² by Tony Hawk himself, Sky Brown is paving the way for a whole new generation of skaters. She is one of the reasons why I personally took up skateboarding. Her videos are so inspiring to watch as she possesses her own unique style and confidence with the board. She grew up surfing with her younger brother and you can see how that style translates with her skateboarding skills; she is very fluid and has a good snap, like a surfer performing a snap on the crest of a wave.

While it is always inspiring for society to witness a kid prodigy of any kind, Sky’s story is remarkable for a few reasons. One of which is that skateboarding, often seen as a male sport, is

¹ Hayes, Martha. “Teenage Skateboard Superstar Sky Brown: 'I Begged My Parents to Let Me Go with Team GB'.” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, July 17, 2021.

² Maine, D’Arcy “Tony Hawk calls Sky Brown 'a unicorn' on a skateboard.” ESPN. ESPN Enterprises, Inc. July 1, 2020.

now being popularized amongst young girls. Going to a skate park in 2021, you will see people of all ages, races, and gender, whereas even a decade ago, this sport was dominated by males. Sky says "I can't imagine why can't girls have fun too. We can do anything that boys can do but why can't we have fun?"³ She is very much an influence in this separation from past stereotypes, as gender often plays a large role in sport. Since the beginning of sport, women have inarguably had a harder time integrating into it than men, but with people like Sky Brown, it is becoming more popular for women to gain confidence and put themselves out there. She has said, "girls can do anything that boys can do but even better, and I feel like sport teaches us confidence and independence."⁴

Skateboarding has a history, a reputation, of being a rebellious activity. All throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s, it was seen as a menace to society performed by a group of outcasts who broke the rules. The stigma that was created throughout these decades which correlated skaters to being "bums" was largely to do with their bold, rebellious stances against the mainstream. Long-haired, pot-smoking, baggy-clothed school drop outs was the image many associated with skateboarding. Remarkably, these teenagers paved the way for youth freedom amongst society, within their households too. For these reasons, it took skateboarding a long time to be recognized as an official, respected sport, as opposed to a hobby. Skateboarding was not introduced to the Olympics until the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. There is much controversy surrounding whether skateboarding should be in the Olympics at all because of what it stands for, and the ideals carried by skaters themselves to go against the grain of society.

³ Bantock, Jack, and Amanda Davies. "Teenage Skateboard Sensation Sky Brown Saddened by Plight of Afghan Girls." CNN. Cable News Network, October 2, 2021.

⁴ Bantock, "Teenage Skateboard Sensation Sky Brown" CNN.

Pro Skater Christian Hosoi comments that perhaps skateboarding should have been part of the Olympics back in the 80s, but he also admits that “at that stage in the evolution of skateboarding [the 80s], we were still trying to find the heart and soul of what we do on a stage. The Olympics wasn’t ready to handle the lifestyle of a skateboarder at that time. We were rough around the edges.”⁵ This is not to say that skateboarding lacks the possession of an immense amount of skill, but skaters themselves were different back then and very much stuck out from the societal norm. A lot of skaters still hold onto these ideas and the integration of skate in the Olympics was met with a lot of resentment. “F*** the Olympics” trended on social media as “old-school skaters [stuck] to the idea of skateboarding as essentially a do-it-yourself, unruly and daring counterculture and safe haven for nerds, misfits, and the underprivileged who neither comply with the physique nor the mindset of mainstream sportspeople.”⁶ These ideals created by the skate culture in previous decades are still held onto tightly by many skaters who believe it should remain an amateur street sport.

As of June 2021, Sky Brown is ranked 2nd worldwide for female skateboarding, at just 13 years of age. She continues to blaze a trail for young women to follow their dreams, and she is setting a new standard for skateboarding professionalism amongst a society that rejected the sport for so long. From a historical standpoint, skateboarding is evolving quickly and the integration of this street sport into the Olympics, led by a young woman, is nothing short of groundbreaking.

⁵ Hayes, “Teenage Skateboard Superstar Sky Brown” The Guardian.

⁶ Wolfram Manzenreiter. *Japan through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020.

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