

Technology, Competitions Encourage Snowboarding Growth in 1980s

The 1980s may conjure up images of Cabbage Patch Dolls, MTV and Pac-Man, the U.S. men's ice hockey team's "miracle" at the 1980 Olympics – and also snowboarding, which exploded onto the scene of winter sports during the eighties.

Snowboarding's first-ever contest was held in 1981 at Ski Cooper, then at Berthoud Pass for the following three years. This King of the Mountain contest attracted some of the biggest names in snowboarding at the time, including Tom Sims, Jake Burton, and Jack Smith. Other events and competitions quickly followed, like the first National Snowsurfing Championship at Suicide Six in Vermont, the first World Snowboard Championships in California in 1983, and the Legendary Mount Baker Banked Slalom in 1985. The contests and events surrounding the sport were beginning to grab everyone's attention.

Technology and features on the boards improved during the decade, with the addition of P-Tex on board bases, highback bindings and metal edges making a noticeable appearance, rounded tails and variations in board shapes, and soft boots.

However, despite improvements in the technology and growth in popularity, most ski resorts did not allow snowboarders. Mark Christensen, a competitor at the first snowboard contest in 1981, describes how they would get around the resort ban on snowboarding: "In those first couple of seasons, when we were trying snowboarding...we were like powder hunters, kind of like in the skateboard days when we were empty pool hunters. So the good thing to do was to get a car full of guys, go up to Loveland Pass, drop all of them off except one, drive the car down to the bottom of the canyon...pick up everybody again, go to the top of the hill and just alternate drivers." During the 1980s, some of the ski areas caved and finally did allow snowboarding, adding to the growth of the sport. Without an official or legitimate place to go snowboarding and experiment, the sport may never have taken off like it did.

Some snowboarding companies began to experience financial difficulties during the 1980s. This included Winterstick, which closed in 1987 and was eventually reopened by a company with no connection to Dimitrije Milovich, as well as A-Team, Flite, and countless guys who were still making homemade snowboards in their garages.

In addition to technological advances and a growing snowboarding community, the sport began attracting more attention from the media. Several snowboarding magazines and coverage emerged, including *Transworld Snowboarding*, *Thrasher*, *Absolutely Radical* (renamed *International Snowboarder Magazine*), and *Snowboarder*. With more exposure, snowboarding was able to reach many more people.

As Tom Sims stated at the first snowboarding contest at Ski Cooper in 1981, "We've got five or six very healthy skiboard manufacturers now, so there's going to be plenty of skiboards available for all those kids that are going to get into it." At the same event, Jake Burton also put in his endorsement for snowboarding: "It's a real good sport, hope everybody gets into it because it's pretty safe, it's a lot of fun." Of course, unlike many other fads and phases, this did happen, and snowboarding did take off. The 1980s were a period of growth, further experimentation, improvements, and recognition, all moving towards a worldwide winter athletic sensation.

Sources included:

Transworld Snowboard History Timeline:

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