

## Snowboarding's First Competition

In April of 1981, a small Colorado resort called Ski Cooper, located near the historic mining town of Leadville, hosted the very first snowboarding contest. This competition attracted early snowboarders like Tom Sims, Jake Burton, Mark Christensen, and others, all vying to see who would become the first King of the Mountain.

Organized by Richard Christiansen, a surf shop owner in Boulder, the contest came about after a customer brought a board into Christiansen's shop, saying he was using it on the snow and calling it a snowboard. As Christiansen remembers, "This was very interesting to me...there was no area in Colorado that actually allowed snowboarding. What we really wanted to do with that sport was try to legitimize it...We called several different ski areas around the Colorado area and none of them actually wanted to have anything to do with snowboarding." However, the owners of Ski Cooper were "constant customers" of Christiansen's shop in Boulder, and, after taking an interest in the idea, agreed to host the competition at their ski area.

However, on the day of the contest, there were no rules. "We were so excited to be able to have an area that participated with us, we basically forgot to make up rules for our contest," said Christiansen. John Hoffman, a judge at the competition, says they "came up with some rules real quick, just about the same as skateboarding...because they were all skateboarders." This contest featured three events: freestyle, slalom, and downhill. Ski Cooper provided some poles for the slalom event, they threw a couple of small jumps in the middle of the downhill run, and competitors showed off their best trick in freestyle.

Jake Burton showed up with a Burton Backhill board with aluminum fins and adjustable front and back bindings. Tom Sims also arrived to compete at Ski Cooper, saying, "I've come a long way as far as product innovation. I started out just having little three-foot wood boards...and now we're working on this Kevlar experimental board which is going to be available for winter 1981-82." As Gary Hornby, a competitor that day at Ski Cooper, remembers, "You were either riding a Burton and modifying the bindings on that thing, or you were riding a Sims and modifying it, or you were riding a Winterstick, if you could afford it."

The overall winner received an audio pack, valued at \$270. Third place went to Jake Burton, Tom Sims came in second, and first place overall was awarded to Scott Jacobson, who also won the freestyle event. After receiving his winnings, Jacobson reflected on the first-ever contest, saying, "This contest was really good, considering it was the first contest ever...but this contest will open up a whole new thing for next year. Next year we're going to be able to do something where it's going to blow minds on ABC Wide World of Sports..." The contest was held at Berthoud Pass for the following two years.

Snowboarding's first competition laid the groundwork for the sport's future. After seeing different styles of riding and various features on each board, modifications and improvements began quickly. Both boards and methods improved, and companies started manufacturing equipment in larger quantities, to satisfy the growing demand and popularity of the sport.

Ski Cooper, where 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division soldiers used to train while stationed at nearby Camp Hale, hosted snowboarding's first competition and helped to open up the idea of snowboarding as a popular sport. Christiansen said, "[Ski Cooper] was pleased with our activity and they decided...to stay open for snowboarding thereafter." With humble beginnings such as this contest, snowboarding now includes millions of people, with annual competitions that attract international boarders and worldwide attention.

Sources included:

Snowboarding's Holy Grail, video produced by First On Board