

Snowboarding goes big More participants, popularity in 1990s

Armed with consistent equipment, techniques, ski area acceptance and the establishment of several large regulatory organizations and companies, snowboarding entered the 1990s, well-equipped for worldwide acceptance.

Most resorts allowed snowboarding on their slopes by the early 1990s. Between 1990 and 2000, snowboarding's ranks swelled from 1.5 million to 4.3 million riders. Meanwhile, the number of skiers dropped by 4 million.

Snowboarding's image has long been influenced by the number of young riders, with teenagers and young adults (ages 12 to 24) making up about 75-80% of the industry. This image was evident in the tastes and styles of the sport, with the huge flood of new riders embracing and reflecting the grunge, hip-hop, punk and skateboarding scenes, all within the snowboarding culture.

Jibbing played a huge role in snowboarding throughout the 1990s. This lively method of freestyle snowboarding, drawing from skateboarding maneuvers, involves tricks on obstacles like trees, rails, stairs, tables and other similar objects. After Vail installed the first snowboarding obstacle park in 1990, intended to cater to the influx of snowboarders, many other resorts followed in their footsteps. With the new addition of in-bounds snowboard terrain parks at many ski resorts, snowboarders now had a designated area to practice techniques, maneuvers and tricks.

Despite the consistent growth of snowboarding leading up to the decade, the ski industry leaders didn't get involved in snowboarding until the 1990s. As Chuck Barfoot said, "Basically, the ski companies were laughing at us ... Little did they know what snowboarding would become." Eventually, major ski companies like Rossignol, K2, Salomon, Volant and Atomic did jump on the bandwagon. Well-established as authentic snowboarding companies like Burton were unharmed and this move just secured a dominant industry position. Jake Burton says, "It's incredible that they all gave me a ten year head start. I had ten years of business before any of those guys got involved, which gave me and gave Burton an opportunity to establish an industry and a company ..."

Equipment continued to make improvements. Baseless bindings, as well as hardboot bindings, were introduced at the 1994 SIA Trade Show in Nevada. The following year, Burton, Airwalk and a few other companies presented step-in soft bindings, with the industry touting it as the next big thing.

Snowboarding finally debuted at the 1998 Winter Olympics, after years of efforts and numerous obstacles. One of the most controversial incidents arose after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) awarded the International Ski Federation (FIS) jurisdiction over managing Olympic snowboarding, as opposed to giving this power to the International Snowboarding Federation (ISF), which the IOC did not formally recognize. Despite plans for a World Cup Tour in 1995, the snowboarding industry felt pushed aside and skeptical of this corporate organization having control over Olympic snowboarding.

With an influx of new riders, media attention and the interest of the ski industry, snowboarding found itself in the mainstream by the 1990s. The media and companies recognized the huge potential in the popular sport, and saw it as a way to reach participants, who were mostly teenagers and young adults.

Snowboarding became attractive to many different groups, for many reasons: youth looking for a fun sport and a good time, ski areas seeking to maintain their numbers, companies that wanted to profit from popularity, and the mainstream, placing

snowboarding on the sports map by including it in the Olympics, magazines and making it accessible to everyone.

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