

Sports
on the

Edge



AMP

Sports on the Edge

Extreme Sports

by Susan Schott Karr

UNUSUAL MOMENTS IN SPORTS

by Lisa Trumbauer

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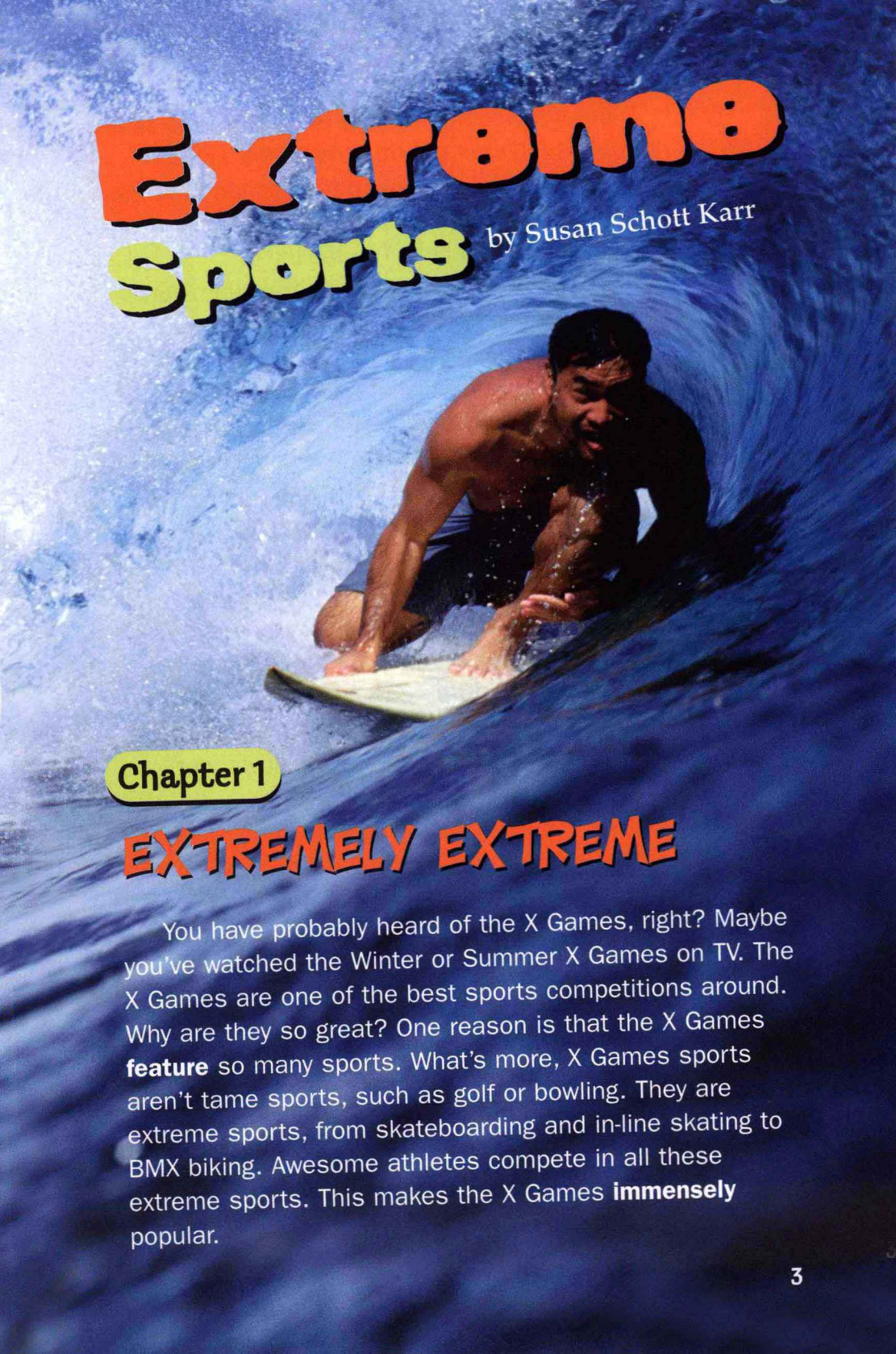
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Extreme Sports

A photograph of a man surfing inside the barrel of a wave. The man is shirtless, wearing dark shorts, and is crouched on his surfboard, looking towards the camera with a smile. The water is a deep blue, and the wave is curling over him, creating a tunnel-like effect. The background is a bright, hazy sky.

by Susan Schott Karr

Chapter 1

EXTREMELY EXTREME

You have probably heard of the X Games, right? Maybe you've watched the Winter or Summer X Games on TV. The X Games are one of the best sports competitions around. Why are they so great? One reason is that the X Games **feature** so many sports. What's more, X Games sports aren't tame sports, such as golf or bowling. They are extreme sports, from skateboarding and in-line skating to BMX biking. Awesome athletes compete in all these extreme sports. This makes the X Games **immensely** popular.

What is it that makes extreme sports so extreme? Is it the extreme feeling athletes get from doing the sport? Maybe—but most athletes get nervous or excited at some point during a game. The sport doesn't have to be extreme at all for this to happen. The feeling of nervousness or excitement comes from adrenaline. Your body makes it. It gives you a burst of energy when you need it.

What about danger? Is that what makes an extreme sport extreme? There must be more to extreme sports than that. Think about it. Many sports are dangerous. People can get hurt playing football. The same goes for soccer and baseball. No one would call baseball an extreme sport!

So what makes a sport extreme? Do you give up? Here's the answer: The people who play extreme sports take huge risks. In fact, when you watch an extreme sport, you might actually think that the person who is doing the sport must be crazy! It takes strength, great timing, and a **range** of skills to perform extreme sports well without getting hurt.

People all over the world take part in extreme sports. You may even do some yourself. In this book, you'll read about some of the risk-loving people who do extreme sports. Some of these sports, such as skateboarding and in-line skating, are in the X Games. They have big stars that you may have heard of. Other sports you'll read about, such as big-wave surfing, aren't in the X Games. Not many people do them. That doesn't mean that these sports are any less extreme. In fact, big-wave surfing might be the most extreme sport of all!

This skateboarder is performing a trick called a kick-flip varial. The rider rotates the board with the back foot.

This book will also show you how many of the extreme sports were invented. You'll find out how they became so popular. You'll read about the dangers that people who take part in extreme sports face every day. You'll also read about athletes who are everyday, **normal** kids. You will see how they became **experts** at some of the most dangerous sports ever invented.

Are you ready to get extreme? Read on. The first sport you'll hear about is skateboarding—one of the most popular extreme sports ever invented.



Chapter 2

SKATEBOARDS IN THE SKY

Can you imagine a world without skateboards? It's hard to picture, but until the 1950s, skateboards didn't even exist! Before the 1950s, skateboards were like scooters. People pulled the wheels off their roller skates. Then, they attached the wheels to a piece of wood and rolled around. That's not even close to being extreme.

Skateboarding changed in the 1950s, thanks to a group of bored surfers! Surfing was very popular in southern California. Yet, serious surfers had a problem. On some days, the waves weren't big enough to surf! Some surfers wanted something to do when the ocean was too calm for surfing. They invented a surfboard they could ride on a sidewalk. They nailed roller-skating wheels to short surfboards. Then, they rode the boards on land. These surfers had a name for their sport. They called it sidewalk surfing.

Sidewalk surfing grew popular, but it still wasn't an extreme sport. The sport had no jumps. The most extreme move was a **mere** handstand on a skateboard. What was keeping the early skateboarders from doing better tricks? The wheels on the skateboards were the main problem. They were made of metal or clay. As soon as the wheels hit a crack in a sidewalk or a stone in a road, they would stop dead. That made it hard for the riders to stay on the board. Imagine a ride so bumpy that it would rattle your bones and your teeth! That was what early skateboarding was like.

Getting Vertical

Early skateboarders didn't wear helmets, pads, or any other safety gear. The sport was just plain dangerous. In 1965, cities began to ban skateboards. Nobody wanted a kid to get hurt on city property. However, that didn't stop serious skateboarders. Some kids kept right on riding.

What changed people's opinion about skateboarding? The sport became safer. That happened in the 1970s. A new kind of wheel came along. The new wheels were made of polyurethane. This very hard material is like plastic. At first, wheels made of polyurethane were used on roller skates. Then, somebody decided to try out these hard wheels on skateboards.

Polyurethane wheels made skateboards roll faster and more smoothly. Skaters could get up enough speed to try new, acrobatic moves. Skaters began to take off! Soon, towns began to build skateboard parks with bowl-shaped areas and ramps. At the parks, skaters could perform more turns and stunts than they could do on city streets.

Another big change in skateboarding happened in the 1970s. The Z-Boys came along. The Z-Boys were a group of friends in California who loved to surf. They all hung out at the Zephyr Surf Shop. The owner of the surf shop saw the friends skateboarding. He asked them to start a skateboard team. He called them the Z-Boys, even though one was a girl!

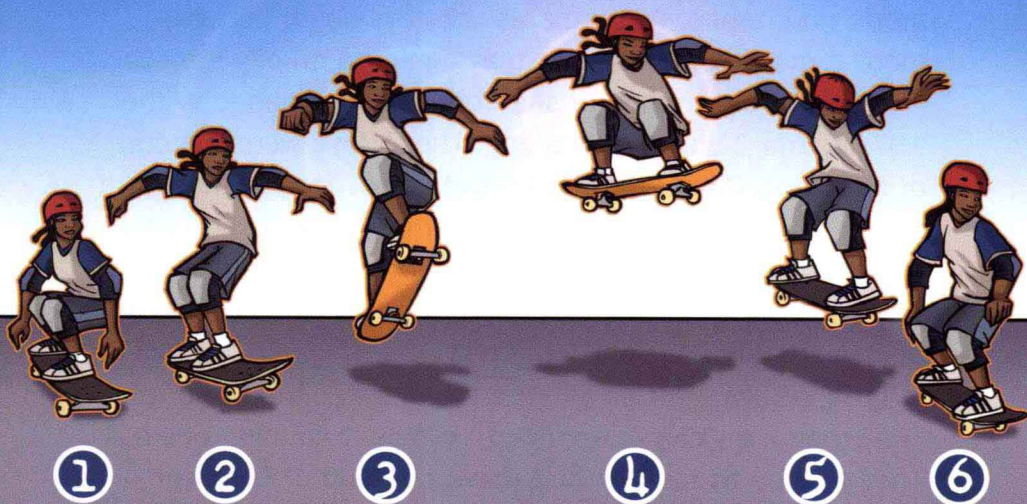
The Z-Boys went on to stun the skateboarding world. They took their skateboards into empty swimming pools. They started by skating fast down one end of the pool. The goal was to get up to the lip on the other side. Then, they did a trick, turned around, and did it again.

Next, the Z-Boys started skating up into the air and then back down. It was the first time a skateboarder had ever gotten off the ground! The Z-Boys had helped invent the high-flying vertical, or “vert,” style of skateboarding. Vert skating is done on ramps or other surfaces that let you do tricks in the air.

The Z-Boys didn’t stop there. They took their boards into city parks and kept inventing **challenging** new ways to skateboard. The sport took on a new level of risk and danger. Extreme skateboarding was born.

Along the way, the Z-Boys learned a trick called the ollie. It was named for its inventor, Alan “Ollie” Gelfand. He came up with a way to jump his board in the air in the late 1970s. Today, the ollie is one of skateboarding’s most basic moves. In fact, a famous dictionary even added an entry for ollie!

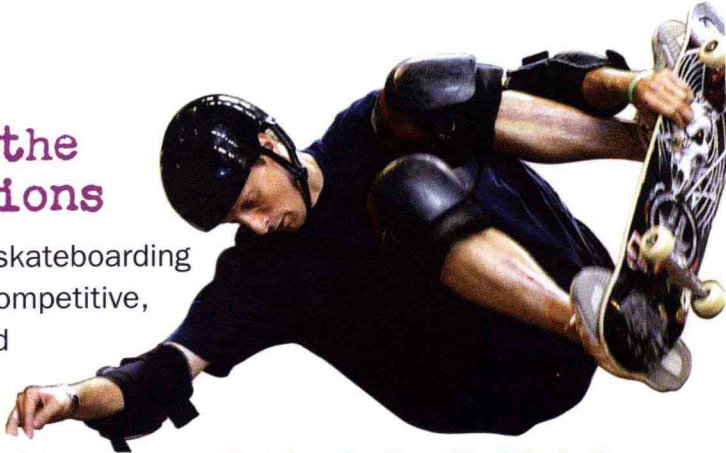
How to Do an Ollie



1. With both feet on the board, begin to pick up some speed. Keep the knees bent.
2. Put the front foot near the middle of the board and the back foot on the tail, or back.
3. Snap the tail to the ground and jump off that back foot into the air. Slide the front foot up to the front of the board and pull the board into the air.
4. At the peak, level out the board.
5. When in the air, find your landing.
6. Make sure to land with knees bent.

Hitting the Competitions

As extreme skateboarding became more competitive, a few things had to change. To make the sport safer, skaters had to wear safety equipment. Today, helmets, knee pads, and elbow pads are **required** gear for anyone who performs extreme tricks.



Skateboarder Tony Hawk looks for a landing point while competing in the X Games.

Before 1995, not many people had even seen the crazy things extreme skaters could do. Then, in 1995, the X Games **featured** skateboarding for the first time. The next year, the sport was **featured** in the Olympic Games. Skateboarding competitions became a big hit. At these games, crowds watched as skaters did tricks in street and halfpipe events.

Street skaters compete while doing tricks on obstacles. They use the kind of ramps, boxes, and rails that you would find in a skate park. In halfpipe events, boarders do lip tricks, aerals, and plants. Lip tricks are done on the edge of the halfpipe, which is a U-shaped ramp. Aerials are done in the air over the halfpipe. Plants are done by putting a hand or foot on the edge of the ramp.

Who's the best skateboarder in the world? Most people say Tony Hawk is the best. Before he retired in 1999, Hawk had won every big skateboarding contest in the world. He invented dozens of tricks. He also landed the "900." That's a twist with two-and-a-half turns in midair. Hawk gives great advice to beginners. He says, "Learn the basics. Learn how to fall. Stick to it, and follow your heart."

Chapter 3

SNOWBOARDERS HIT THE BIG TIME

What makes snowboarding so much fun? It's three extreme sports in one. First, snowboarding is like skiing. Snowboarders speed down mountains, just as skiers do. Snowboarding is also like surfing. The boards look like surfboards. Snowboarders turn their snowboards on a mountain, just as surfers turn their surfboards on a wave. Extreme snowboarding is also like extreme skateboarding. Both sports have dangerous moves and jumps.

Yet, snowboarding doesn't **merely** copy other sports. It has its own style and moves. It even has its own words. For example, have you ever heard of "goofy footers"? Goofy footers put their right foot on the front of the snowboard. Regular footers lead with their left foot.

No matter which foot they put first, all snowboarders choose a **route** down a hill. This **route** is called a "run." A snowboarder's run depends on the kind of snowboarding he or she is doing. There are three basic styles of snowboarding: freestyle, freeride, and alpine. All these styles of snowboarding are extreme, but in different ways.

Freestyle snowboarding is full of jumps and tricks. People do this kind of snowboarding with halfpipes, rails, and other **challenges**. These halfpipe ramps are made from snow, and they can be huge. The biggest halfpipes are called superpipes. The walls of a superpipe are between 15 and 20 feet high. That height gives a freestyle snowboarder a lot of time in the air. For instance, in a trick called a 360 air, snowboarders turn a full circle in the air. They land riding forward, if they're lucky!

Freeriders ride their snowboards down mountains. Freeriders like to test their skills. They might try to ride over rocks or deep snow. **Expert** freeriders head to Alaska to compete in an event called King of the Hill. The fastest riders can race down an **immense** 4,200-foot slope in less than 3 minutes!

The third style of snowboarding is called alpine riding. *Alpine* means “mountain.” The important part of alpine riding is cutting deep, smooth turns in mountain snow. This lets riders build up speed. Alpine riders go at top speeds. They really need to know how to fall without getting hurt!

From Snurfer to Snowboard

How did snowboarding get started? It began in the 1960s. A man named Sherman Poppen wanted to make a new toy for his daughter Wendy. He made the toy by bolting two skis together. Poppen called the toy a Snurfer, putting the words *snow* and *surf* together. Before long, he was selling his Snurfer in stores. Thousands of kids tried out Snurfers. They rode them on sledding hills. Back in the 1960s, Snurfers were not allowed on ski hills.

A kid named Jake Burton Carpenter tried the Snurfer in 1965. He was 14. Carpenter loved to ski, and after he graduated from college, he decided to try to improve the Snurfer. He invented a new kind of board, the Burton Snowboard. Then, he began selling his snowboards. They were the first modern snowboards, and they were very successful. More and more people began using the new boards. Riders begged ski resorts to open their runs to people with snowboards. In the early 1980s, a ski resort finally decided to allow snowboarders. Soon, more ski resorts let in snowboarders.

Ski resorts began having snowboarding competitions. In 1982, the first national snowboard championship was held in Vermont. It had only one race. Competitors rode their snowboards down a scary hill called The Face. Riders weren't trying any fancy moves. They were just trying to make it to the bottom of The Face alive!

After that, competitions usually had a freestyle event and an alpine event. Jeff Brushie was the first great freestyler. One of his best moves was called the McTwist. In this trick, Brushie completed one-and-a-half turns in the air. The McTwist is now a standard move in freestyle events. Every extreme snowboarder learns the trick.

Craig Kelly was the best alpine snowboarder back in the 1980s. He was known for the graceful curves he sliced down the side of a mountain. Tragically, 20 years later, Kelly was killed in an avalanche. He was doing what he loved best—snowboarding.

Jeff Brushie in action



Snowboards Rule!

Snowboarding wasn't just getting popular in the United States in the 1980s. Big snowboarding contests were also being held in Europe and Japan. Then, in 1987, some snowboarding stars appeared in a TV commercial. That was the first time many people ever heard of snowboarding. Ten years later, in 1997, the sport was **featured** in the first Winter X Games. Snowboarding had come a long way since the Snurfer!

Now only one thing was missing. Snowboarding still wasn't in the Olympic Games. That changed in 1998 with the Olympic Winter Games in Nagano, Japan. In the halfpipe event, snowboarders did their moves to rock music blaring from big speakers. People loved it.

After the 1998 Olympic Games, snowboarding became the fastest-growing sport in the United States. Four years later, the 2002 Winter Olympics were held in Salt Lake City, Utah. Everyone wanted to see the snowboarders. Thousands of fans watched in person. Millions more watched on television.

American fans were not disappointed in the **outcome** of the games. The United States won more snowboarding medals than any other country. Ross Powers won the gold medal in Men's Halfpipe. Kelly Clark won the gold medal for the Women's Halfpipe. Clark was only 18 years old. She amazed the crowd with her freestyle moves.

Of course, becoming an Olympic champion like Clark or Powers is quite an **undertaking**. Many pro snowboarders practice every day, even in the summer. They ride in-line skates or skateboards. They also practice flips and jumps on a trampoline. They spend hours and hours training to be the best.

Meet Shaun White

Who is one of the best young snowboarders around? Shaun White would be on any list of the best young stars. White was born in 1986. In 2002, he won a car in a snowboarding event. He wasn't even old enough to drive it!

White started snowboarding when he was six years old. At a **mere** 13 years of age, he turned pro. Everyone who has watched White compete says the same thing about him. He is a natural athlete. He is unbeatable at the slopestyle event. Slopestyle is like alpine and freestyle put together. Riders are **required** to do freestyle moves on a mountain course, instead of on a superpipe.

In 2003, White ruled the Winter X Games. He won the gold medal in the slopestyle and superpipe events. He was also named the best athlete of the games. Just one month later, he was the youngest snowboarder ever to win the U.S. Open Slopestyle event.

White loves skateboarding, too. He skated in the Summer X Games in 2003. He was the first athlete ever to compete in both the Summer and Winter X Games. Though he didn't win any gold medals at the summer games, he did nail all his tricks on his last run in the vert event.

What's it like to be a teenager and a pro athlete? White has won big-money prizes. He is mobbed by fans at events. At the same time, he's a **normal** kid. His parents travel with him to contests when they can. They also think it's important for White to keep up with school. He studies on his own when he is on the road.

The secret of White's success is not just his **physical** ability. It's also **mental**. He says, "I don't compete against anyone else. I don't worry about the judges. I just try to do it the best I can."

What's Next?

What will snowboarders think of next? Riding the rails is a new event. When a skateboarder slides a skateboard down a railing, it's called grinding. Now snowboarders are doing some grinding of their own. They compete in special rail-sliding contests. If they just want to have fun, they can **locate** some rails around town on a snowy day. They can also head to a ski resort. Some ski resorts have more rails than a skate park!

You can expect to see more snowboarding teams from colleges, too. Plenty of colleges have snowboarding teams today. They compete in the same events as pro snowboarders. One thing is sure: This extreme sport is big and getting bigger. You could say that only one thing stands in the way of snowboarding—global warming!

**Snowboarder Kelly Clark,
Olympic gold medalist,
gets ready to land on a rail.**



Chapter 4

BMX BEASTS

You have probably heard of BMX. You may even have a BMX bike of your own. Still, lots of people don't even know what BMX stands for. Do you?

BMX stands for bicycle motocross. Back in the 1960s, there were some bike riders who loved motorcycle motocross racing. Motocross riders race their motorcycles on dirt tracks. The bike riders thought it would be fun to do the same thing. They started racing their bikes on the same motocross **routes**. They also started trick riding. That means doing bike stunts.

The first BMX riders had a problem, however. Most bikes in the 1960s weren't built for tricks. The riders had **normal** road bikes. The bikes were very heavy; they weren't very strong; and the tires were skinny. There was one bike that was different. It was a little bike called the Sting-Ray.

The Sting-Ray had a long "banana seat" and very high handlebars. It had coaster brakes, the kind that stop the bike when you pedal backwards. It was smaller and lighter than a **normal** bike. The Sting-Ray was also much lower to the ground than a **normal** bicycle was, and it had fatter tires. Most important, Sting-Rays were more rugged than regular road bikes. That meant you could do things on a Sting-Ray that would wreck a normal bike.

Then one day, an extreme skateboarder named Bob Haro tried some tricks on his Sting-Ray. The bike was perfect for performing tricks. In the 1970s, Haro started taking his bike to parks and empty swimming pools, just as the skateboarders were doing. He was no **mere** bike rider. Bob Haro had style.