3 Skateboarding

“F*** the Olympics”

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For the IOC, granting skateboarding entry to the Tokyo Olympics was a strategic move to sustain interest in its flagship events among younger generations and new media consumers. “We want to take sport to the youth,” explained IOC president Bach. “F*** the Olympics,” echoed replies through social media channels. Old-school skaters stick 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. For them, Olympic skateboarding is sort of a mixed blessing, at best.

“Street” and “park” competitions at Tokyo 2020 are a joint product by the Fédération Internationale de Roller Sports and the International Skateboarding Federation. Street courses resemble Street League events, featuring rails, hubbas, ledges, stairs, etc. Park competitions take place along steep walls and tricky curves. Judges will rate runs according to difficulty and variety of flips, spins, and height of jumps. Forty male and forty female skateboarders will qualify themselves at major tournaments prior to the Games. Japan is guaranteed four slots. Thirteen-year old world champion Okamoto Misugu or 2017 world champion Nishimura Aori are very likely to enter the competition, assuming they don’t get injured. Injuries are part of any skater’s biography, no matter what level.

Skateboarding reached Japan in the 1970s. After years of ups and downs, Japan’s skateboarding scene now numbers 400,000 skaters. Only a handful can make a living through the sport. About 1,000 pros and amateurs appear annually at the contests sponsored by the three associations governing the sport. The associations also license pro-skaters and judges, train new blood, and link up with the TOCOG. The greatest challenges are the never-ending conflicts between skaters taking over the city as their playground and municipal governments banishing skateboarding from residential and business areas.

Although the Olympic skatepark at the Ariake Urban Sports Venue can’t compensate for overall shortage of facilities, it might help mitigate the conflict. Already, on the day of the events, the skatepark will be opened to the general public. This is a noble gesture and great publicity move. It will also have the IOC navigate through a legal minefield, as the TOP sponsors of Olympic sports won’t be amused to see the skaters flash out their most preferential brands of wear and gear.