

Skate Like a Girl Wheels of Fortune 8, May 2017

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The Skate Like a Girl's 2017 Wheels of Fortune event occurred over the weekend of May 5⁻⁷ in Seattle, WA. Featuring a women's street skateboarding competition, Seattle wide team-based scavenger hunt, art and video showcases, yoga, intention setting and a low stress jam session, it seemed to have a little something for everyone. The event was a great activation of public and private skatepark space and helps to strengthen the female skate scene in the North-West (and globally) every year. Friday's skate session at All Together Skatepark (Seattle's premier indoor skate scene shepherded by Marshall Reid) brought this "expert" skater of 19 years into a newfound sense of skatepark intimidation upon seeing he was the only rider lacking the prerequisite set of chromosomes. Upon noticing this apparent discomfort, my girlfriend/pro skater gave me a knowing smile and said "now you know how it feels." And she was right, this was a novel feeling that allowed me to better understand one brick in the wall of what a marginalized athlete might encounter on a daily basis. Luckily, it wasn't long before I felt back at home at the skatepark, thanks to the welcoming vibe of the ~~girls skating~~ skateboarders.

And that seemed to be the general vibe of the weekend. Skateboarders activating their space for their community, bringing people together in the name of fun, growth and support. The main difference being that probably 95% of the people there were women. That, and some of Saturday's scavenger hunt list items were focused on flipping the script for female skaters (including such tasks as: 1- Tell a boy he's too cute to skateboard, which I did. 2-Explain a trick to a guy. 3 – Tell a guy at the skatepark "It's good to see you out here, you know, representing.") It became clear, through this hilarity, that these moments helped take something normally marginalizing and turned it into something fun and rather empowering. This theme of empowerment, while not explicit, ran through the veins of the weekend. The loosely structured Skate Witches scavenger hunt made us all feel like we were a part of a larger unit, scattered about the city, pushing the rules and ourselves in the name of fun and the lady skate family. Frankly, I felt lucky and honored to be a part of it. The reactions from local skate bros at the various public parks we went to while checking items off the list told me that there was nothing but respect for the effort and love being put in. It was clear, without the larger sponsors seen at normal contests, that these women were charging ahead while running on their own home made fuel – as "skateboarding" as it gets. People speak of the dangers of the sponsorship spectrum, ranging from core cannibalization to distortion from the deal, but until bigger sponsors come on to cash in, I'm glad to see the true heart of skateboarding is pumping in the form of SLAG's annual main event.

That is to say nothing of their week to week programming, helping 100's of kids at each of their three chapters (Seattle, Portland and San Francisco). In my many conversations with various staff members and volunteers, SLAGs provincial properties maintained topical. With recent internal structure bolstering, they've found steady footing to provide local girls and boys with consistent community classes and camps helping them to learn about themselves through the act of skateboarding. Many of those volunteers (in fact, they had more volunteers than competitors signed up) were there to support.

By the time Sunday came around, the gears had shifted into competition mode. With 97 people skating, including some of the world's best female street skaters, it was going to be an afternoon of heavy skating. But not after the other divisions had their shot at the spotlight. For a low-key contest, there was certainly a lot of vocal support (as-is in all skateboarding, it is easily doubled in "women's skateboarding"). One rad element of the beginner's contest was the fact that it was co-ed. I left feeling happy that some of these young boys would have their first skate contest experience at a women's event – the vibe just seems to be more fun and inclusive. Another moment of note was the depth of talent (and lack there-of, unapologetically, and appreciably) in the Golden Girls division, slated only for those of three decades or more on this planet. From high skill, to low thrill, the smiles were consistent and the support persistent.

Then came the heavy hitters – Lacy, Alexis, Mariah and more, doing tricks that this veteran street skater would need some serious convincing to lean into. Unfortunately, due to the nature of skateboarding contests (see: delayed) we had to leave to catch our flight. But not before we bore witness to a kickflip fastplant over the box to flat (a trick of ungendered difficulty) and a fastplant frotnside-one eighty that was lunged over a needless distance, arriving at a snapped nose - yet somehow rolling away. A thunderous applause shook through the park, reminding us all that "holy \$%^t, skateboarding rules."

Upon speaking with our resident expert on women's skateboarding, we agreed that this annual event is one of the great anchors of the women's skate scene. It seemed that THF's presence there lends a sense of much appreciated validation to a hard-working organization. While not as "polished" as some of the high-profile skate events out there, they continue to add to a strong foundation, growing and supporting their effective grass roots efforts.