

Lucky Hawk

Gigantic Skate Park Tour

Tony Hawk answers the phone at his Carlsbad home. He has been expecting the call, arranged by a Manhattan publicist, who set a 15-minute limit. Fifteen minutes and fame just seem to go together.

The skateboarding "legend," as he is billed, will conclude his ten-city Tony Hawk Gigantic Skate Park Tour this weekend. How does he rate the 37,000-square-foot skate park in Encinitas, where the finale will take place? "It's good. It's among the biggest parks. It's got a little of everything," says Hawk, who designed its 13-foot vertical ramp, which has a 19-foot roll-in, 15-foot

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extensions, and a 15-foot floating platform.

Hawk began his career at the Del Mar Skate Ranch. It would be a holy place to fans if it weren't defunct — a dinosaur, demolished. There, in 1982, Hawk won his first contest, having turned pro at age 14. Twenty years later, he is the most revered skateboarder in the sport's short history.

How much does success depend on the quality of the skate parks that a skater skates? "It can help your progress if you have access to something diverse," says Hawk. "But success really depends on how determined you are. If you're determined to improve your skills, you're going to, no matter what's presented to you."

Now that he's 34, does he see skateboarding as a sport for life or one merely for the young? "I think it transcends age groups, especially nowadays." But youthful flexibility is required for skateboarding, no? "Well, it always helps to learn a physical skill when you're young, because the coordination stays with you. But I've honestly seen people of all ages skating — parents with their kids and even older."

Hawk is one such parent. His eldest son, nine-year-old Riley, will perform with him on Friday.

It's also true that this father of three performed the first "900" in skateboarding history at the X-Games in San Francisco, just three years ago. (The 900 consists of two-and-a-half 360-degree mid-air somersaults. "This is the best day of my life, I swear to God," Hawk was quoted as saying by ESPN. "That's it for me, I swear. What else is there? The 900 was my goal.")

The five-time X-Games gold medalist is credited not only with athletic accomplishments but with



Tony Hawk

ambassadorial ones. More than anyone else, he is said to have changed skateboarding's image from that of a time-wasting pastime of disaffected, tattooed teens to a respected, if "alternative," sport.

Hawk is asked if the sport's newfound legitimacy has produced any negative changes. "Some people will say, 'Oh, it's not as soulful.'" But that gripe doesn't concern him. What does bother him is people who lump skateboarding together with other so-called extreme sports. "Suddenly people assume that just because you're a skateboarder, you're also a rock climber, and that you like to go sky surfing, and that you do lugeing downhill. But for us — the skateboarders — we skate. It's not about doing other sports that people think are similar. It would be like saying, 'Oh, yeah, baseball. You must be into all ball sports.'" Says Hawk, "I really don't compare skateboarding to anything. If people ask me what skateboarding is, I tell them it's a sport, it's an art form, and it can be a way of life."

Does Hawk still have the time and

inclination to make up new moves? The inventor of the Stale Fish, Madonna, and Varial 540 says he does but has become more "calculated" with experimentation, because of advancing age. "Instead of just leaving it up to fate, I try to figure it out, mentally, beforehand, because I know an injury isn't going to be as easy to bounce back from as it used to be."

Lucky Hawk says he has broken only one bone — "my elbow a few years ago."

When Hawk began, money wasn't to be made in skateboarding. "Even if I had dreamed of being a pro skater, pro skaters weren't rich or famous. Maybe they got in the magazines and had sponsorship, but that wasn't what anybody aspired to." Yes, he bought his first house at age 17, but he committed to skateboarding because "it was the one thing I kept improving at and that I enjoyed doing on my own."

Today, skateboarding is an industry, with careers available for many more people than the gods. Garrett Bjornson is one such careerist. And

despite the opportunity, this director of the skate park in Encinitas sounds nonetheless ungrateful. Even "breathing" the name "Tony Hawk" in the public's direction, he says, will mean 500 calls a day on his personal line. "And they'll ask the stupidest questions," says Bjornson. "Like, 'What's the name of Tony Hawk's dog?' This is the hometown stop on his tour, and they're going to come out for it." He expects 2000 people; 1500 came last year. He cannot accommodate the crush. Parking is severely limited. He pleads for no publicity.

— Jeanne Schinto

ESPN Gigantic Skate Park Tour Featuring Tony Hawk and Friends

Magdalena Ecke YMCA
200 Saxony Road, Encinitas

Friday, July 26,
1:00 p.m.—4:00 p.m.

(Doors open at noon)

Free

Info: 760-942-9622 ext. 1603 or
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