

Sidedoor S6 Ep. 17 X-Games Final Transcription

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Lizzie Peabody: Hey, Sidedoor listeners. We are officially between seasons right now, but we have a little bonus for you. Last summer, we reported a story about skateboarding. One of my favorites, actually. And this summer, for the first time ever, skateboarding is an Olympic sport. So, we wanted to play that skateboarding story for you now because, just speaking for myself, I think it's always more exciting to watch a competition when you know the story behind it. And this is a good story. But before we play that episode, I wanted to get a little Olympic preview from one of the experts about what we can expect to see at the games. And she told me...

Jane Rogers: I don't know really know what's going to happen. It's going to be interesting to see how it plays out.

Lizzie Peabody: Jane Rogers is a curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Jane Rogers: And I specialize in action, extreme sports, snowboarding, skateboarding, surfing, that kind of thing.

Lizzie Peabody: So, okay. This summer, skateboarding will be broadcast as an Olympic sport for the first time ever.

Jane Rogers: Yes.

Lizzie Peabody: Why is this a big deal?

Jane Rogers: It's a big deal because the Olympics validates sports. So, if this is going to be a competitive sport, being in the Olympics is where you want to be.

Lizzie Peabody: But not everyone is happy about skateboarding joining the Olympics. And Jane says that has to do with how the sport began.

Jane Rogers: I mean, people used to skateboard to get away from the organized sports. From the coaches, from the parents yelling in the stands.

Lizzie Peabody: When skateboarding gained popularity in the 1970s, it was counterculture. You didn't need teams or uniforms or anyone's approval. You just needed a board and you could head to the skate park or just a parking lot and pop an ollie or grind some gnarly rails.

Jane Rogers: You could do it anywhere and it didn't cost that much and you got away from your parents and that kind of thing.

Lizzie Peabody: Skateboarding got a reputation for drawing loners and rebels, the kids who weren't interested in organized sports. So, it seems like historically, skateboarding as a sport is sort of more about freedom of expression and community than about competition, right?

Jane Rogers: Correct.

Lizzie Peabody: But over time, skateboarding has grown and matured. Older skaters have become ambassadors for the sport. They're more opportunities to compete and more sponsorship money in play.

Jane Rogers: It's becoming a professional competitive sport.

Lizzie Peabody: And the Olympics is sort of imposing structure on something that has typically been unstructured.

Jane Rogers: Yes. Correct.

Lizzie Peabody: So, the Olympics has provoked this conversation in the skating community about, is skateboarding a lifestyle or a sport.

Jane Rogers: Which one is it? It's big thing, in the community.

Lizzie Peabody: But one thing is certain. More people will be watching skateboarding this summer than ever before. The Olympics will raise the international profile of skating, but also skaters. Both men and women. And Jane says, this is a big deal because even though women have always been involved in the sport...

Jane Rogers: They have not gotten the recognition and I think, in a male dominated sport where it's mostly geared towards young males, it's hard to be a female amongst all that. And I think the X Games pay equity boycott, I think it was almost like a line in the sand.

Lizzie Peabody: The story of that line in the sand and the women who drew it is the story we have for you right now. And I'm particularly excited to share it because one of those women is none other than the U.S. Women's Olympic team coach in Tokyo right now. Let's have a listen.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This is Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. I'm Lizzie Peabody.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Mimi Knoop moved a lot as a kid and wherever she landed, she found a group of friends who all shared at least one thing. They loved skateboarding. And in the 1980s, that meant Mimi hung out with a lot of boys.

Mimi Knoop: I didn't have any other girlfriends that skated. So, I just had my friends that were boys who I skated with from that time all the way until my early twenties, I would say.

Lizzie Peabody: After college, Mimi moved to the Virgin Islands to work as a bartender, as one does. And one day as she cleaned glasses and wiped down the bar top, something on TV caught her eye.

Mimi Knoop: I glanced up and saw a women's skateboarding contest on the TV, which you didn't really see skateboarding in general on TV back then so that was a big deal to begin with. And then I realized they were women and I'm like, wait a second. And I'm like, shoot, I missed the boat, I should have tried that, I didn't know you could do that. I never saw, really, any other girls or women either in any of the magazines or videos so it never clicked for me that that was an option.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh, you felt like you had already missed your opportunity?

Mimi Knoop: Yeah. I mean, I was 22 years old, so I was like, well, oh, well, I blew it. I didn't get into that...

Lizzie Peabody: Over the hill.

Mimi Knoop: Yeah, I'm over the hill too, I didn't get into that 10 years ago. But it just planted the seed that that was out there but I had no idea that I could do that.

Lizzie Peabody: When mixing margaritas got old, Mimi moved to San Diego, which is a bit of a skateboarding Mecca. Hanging around San Diego's skate parks, Knoop found a new crew, but this time something was different. There were girls there and one of them was a skateboarder named Cara-Beth Burnside. And for those of us who weren't women's skateboarding buffs in the early 2000s, bumping into Cara-Beth Burnside at a skate park is a bit like practicing free-throws at your local rec center and meeting Michael Jordan.

Mimi Knoop: And one thing led to another and she's like, you should enter these contests with us.

Lizzie Peabody: Which is kind of like MJ asking you if you want to join the Chicago Bulls. The only answer is heck yes. And that's how Knoop came to enter her first skateboarding competition. But first, she had to learn one important thing called 'dropping in'.

Mimi Knoop: Dropping in is one of the first things you learn as a skater, if you're skating ramps or transition because it's just a way for you to begin your run.

Lizzie Peabody: Here's how it works. You climb up to a platform at one end of a tall U-shaped ramp.

Mimi Knoop: So, you walk up and you put your board on the side of the ramp.

Lizzie Peabody: With your back foot, you pin the board on the edge of the ramp, so it sticks out like a diving board. And then with your other foot, you step onto the front of the skateboard and lean your weight forward. And then you fall until the ramp catches the board's wheels under you.

Mimi Knoop: You definitely have to commit and a lot of people will half commit so then they slipped back.

Lizzie Peabody: Landing on their back or their butt.

Mimi Knoop: And a lot of people over-committing and they slam forward.

Lizzie Peabody: Landing on their face.

Mimi Knoop: That's one of the scariest things, I would say. Once you figure out how to get over that, then you can do anything.

Lizzie Peabody: So, having just learned to drop in, Knoop enters the same competition she saw two years earlier on TV.

Mimi Knoop: Which was pretty crazy. I was horrified. For me, it was survival mode of just go and participate and get out of there. I definitely got last place. There was no question in my mind. I was just excited to be there.

Lizzie Peabody: Mimi actually didn't finish in last place. She came in fifth place out of seven skateboarders and she got paid.

Mimi Knoop: I think I won \$100 and I've never been more excited about a check before. I just was like, wow, this is money that came to me for riding my skateboard. How cool is that.

Lizzie Peabody: Now, technically Mimi was a professional skateboarder and she was just getting started. So, this time on Sidedoor, we tell the story of how Mimi Knoop, alongside her friend, Cara-Beth Burnside, forged an alliance to pick a fight with a billion-dollar industry that refuse to see their value as skateboarders and as women. All that after a quick break.

[MUSIC]

Speaker 4: It's the dawn of a new age and your perception of sports is about to change. No bats, no balls, no sticks, no boundaries. From this day...

Lizzie Peabody: This is how ESPN heralded a new era of sports. On June 24th, 1995, the sports broadcaster debuted their brand-new sports festival in the most extreme place you could imagine. Newport, Rhode Island.

Speaker 4: From this day forward, the world and sports will never be the same. These are the Extreme Games.

Lizzie Peabody: Kick off your boat shoes because it's time for the Extreme Games, but you probably know them as the X Games. This series of radical sporting events happened in cities, from Rhode Island to Maine. Tim Reed is from Newport and he remembers the energy these games brought to the region.

Tim Reed: Wind surfing was at one location and wakeboarding was at another. They had mountain biking up in New Hampshire or Vermont. I can't remember which one. So, it was a lot of satellite venues but then [inaudible 00:11:03].

Lizzie Peabody: Reed knows a thing or two about the X Games because today, he's the Vice President of the X Games. Other sports from the first games included street luge, rollerblading and something called skysurfing.

Speaker 7: This is a great round for Troy Hartman, finishing with the rogaine and it all started with the incredible invisible man.

Tim Reed: And I think that was the whole conceit early on, was there's all these disparate adventure extreme sports that are out there. Let's try to bring them all together, create the Olympics of action sports or extreme sports and see where it goes.

Lizzie Peabody: Since the X Games were so new, in its first few years, organizer just figured it out as they went. Here's Chris Stiepock, the guy in charge of the X Games back then.

Chris Stiepock: Those first couple of years in Rhode Island, we were all just innocent and we were just trying to figure it all out. Start a brand. And the athletes who competed in those sports were very gifted and they were really just waiting for a platform.

Lizzie Peabody: And the X Games turned out to be the perfect platform. By the late 1990s, the X Games had largely congealed into the games we know today. ESPN relentlessly promoted its biggest stars and a handful of male skateboarders, like Tony Hawk, became global icons.

Speaker 8: [foreign language 00:12:31] Tony Hawk [foreign language 00:12:31].

Lizzie Peabody: This generated a ton of money for the X Games and the athletes they showcased. But while the men cashed in, the women didn't. I asked Betsy Gordon about this. She's a skateboard curator at the National Museum of the American Indian and unofficial

Smithsonian skateboarding historian. And she said to understand why this might be, you have to take a look back to how skateboarding evolved. After all, it's a pretty new sport.

Beth Gordon: It's really interesting to me because the first commercially available skateboards were in the 60s. And if you look at those advertisements in magazines, they always show girls and boys skating. And in the 70s, as skating started growing up and they started having skateboard competition, lots of girls skated.

Lizzie Peabody: This is right around the time Cara-Beth Burnside started skating. You might remember her as the Michael Jordan of women's skateboarding. When she was a kid, there were contests for girls but after a couple years they got canceled.

Cara-Beth Burnside: And the only thing that was out there for me was to skate with the amateur boys. So that meant the ones like Tony Hawk did.

Lizzie Peabody: Without contests, not many girls built reputations as star skaters. So, skate magazines didn't pay much attention.

Beth Gordon: In the 80s, with the dawn of more mass skate media magazines, somehow girls just weren't getting in there. Weren't getting the coverage.

Lizzie Peabody: For the most part, the only women you'd see in skateboarding magazines, well, they sure weren't skateboarders.

Beth Gordon: Well, in terms of advertising, they were showing models and models that didn't have a lot of clothes on, for the most part. So, it was very highly sexualized. So, I think it was very hard for women who skated to see themselves reflected in media, but also to see themselves where other skaters skated.

Lizzie Peabody: And since female skaters weren't shown in movies and magazines, sponsors didn't support them. And since they didn't get sponsor money, it was hard to make a living.

Cara-Beth Burnside: I wanted to be a pro skateboarder but even if I'm on a team and the company likes me, if the dude that skate are complaining because they have a girl on the team and they're giving product, but, oh, shoot, if we start paying you, those guys are going to be bummed and complaining.

Lizzie Peabody: Yeah. Even if a company wanted to sponsor a female skateboarder, they might get pushback from male skateboarders. So, in the early 1990s, Burnside was one of the few pro female skateboarders who had a corporate sponsor, Vans. One of the biggest names in skateboarding apparel sponsored her to the tune of \$50 a month.

Cara-Beth Burnside: So, I started entering contests pro and skating with the guys, but it didn't matter. I couldn't ever be good enough. I thought I had really good tricks and I did, but it's like, you're a girl and that's just the way it is.

Lizzie Peabody: It was so hard making a living and skateboarding as a woman that Burnside had to go pro in a second sport to support herself.

Cara-Beth Burnside: Yeah. I started snowboarding because I couldn't do what I wanted to do in skateboarding. It just was really hard. I lived near Tahoe and I went and there was all these girls' contests and I was like, holy (beep). They're winning that much money. I'm like, I got to get good at this.

Lizzie Peabody: So, she did. And she became one of the best. In the 1998 Winter X Games, Burnside finished first in half-pipe.

Speaker 11: She is the best women's vert skateboarder in the world and you're right, you see it included in her style and superpipe.

Speaker 12: Nice backside alley-oop. Very nice.

Lizzie Peabody: And for that gold medal, the X Games awarded her \$10,000.00.

Cara-Beth Burnside: And then my sponsor doubled it. So that's 20 G's. It was just like, okay, well I'm winning big money snowboarding, I still wanted to skate but I had to figure out a way to make money.

Lizzie Peabody: Burnside was also a member of the first ever U.S. Olympic snowboarding team. And just think about that. Most people, if they need extra money, they become a bartender, a tutor, a waiter or they weave their own potholders. You know, a typical part-time job. But Burnside, she went pro in a second sport. That's amazing. Then in the late 90s, Vans made the Cara-Beth Burnside shoe. It was just the second shoe to be named after a female athlete in any sport. Meanwhile, Mimi Knoop, Burnside's pal who we left back in San Diego, wondered if it was possible for any female skater who wasn't Cara-Beth Burnside to make a career in skateboarding.

Mimi Knoop: It became pretty clear, pretty quick that there is a glass ceiling there and I was seeing people that I looked up to, that were the best in the world not bring home very much money.

Lizzie Peabody: But she kept grinding.

Speaker 13: Our next rider, her name's Mimi Knoop.

Lizzie Peabody: Her event was called the vert, named after the ramp's tall vertical walls. And at the beginning of her competitive career, Mimi mostly finished in fourth or fifth, but over time she'd occasionally crack the podium until after a while, she started to win.

Speaker 13: ... Mimi Knoop, now Mimi is known for being a solid, consistent, better. That's why she took the big win last weekend at the Soul Bowl.

Lizzie Peabody: Knoop says the contests made her better.

Mimi Knoop: I would more or less get ideas at the end of a contest. And then it was fuel for me to work on certain things.

Speaker 13: ... Hotrod. Look at that frontside boneless. Yeah, Mimi! I never saw her do that before.

Lizzie Peabody: And she climbed the women's skateboarding ranks. One trick that Mimi perfected was something called a frontside invert. Honestly, I've watched a bunch of skateboarding videos in the last few weeks. And this one is by far the easiest to explain.

Mimi Knoop: So, you ride up the ramp and you pivot on your front hand, on the top of the ramp and then the board goes over your head. And then you aim for where you're planted hand is and you push off the wall and then land where you're planted hand is.

Lizzie Peabody: So, you plant your hand on the wall, you and your skateboard swivel around and then land where your hand is planted.

Mimi Knoop: Exactly.

Lizzie Peabody: So, I'm almost picturing like a one-handed cartwheel, but sideways.

Mimi Knoop: Kind of like that. Yeah. And it's a little blind on the re-entry so that's why it's a little scary. You don't really know; you just have to commit and hope it works out the first couple of times.

Lizzie Peabody: I'm seeing a theme here in what makes for great skateboarding. Commit and hope it works out is also how Mimi approached her skateboarding career. And it did work out. In 2003, she was invited to the first X Games that featured women's skateboarding as a metaled event. It was in downtown Los Angeles.

Mimi Knoop: I was like, whoa, this is what I used to watch on TV in high school or whatever. So, I was ecstatic to go and just participate.

Lizzie Peabody: The X Games were held in the Staples Center. It's a huge multi-purpose arena shared by Kobe Bryant and his LA Lakers, the NBA's Clippers and hockey's Kings. Here's X Games VP, Tim Reed, again.

Tim Reed: Hundreds of thousands of people coming out to the event.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh, wow.

Tim Reed: It's a big gathering. Music, events, downtown LA. So, at that point, I mean, again, it felt like the event had definitely arrived and everyone was aware of it and it was great.

Mimi Knoop: In those early years, it felt validating. It felt like, okay, people were backing our skating because we were on this big stage.

Lizzie Peabody: So, at that first X Games, was that the largest audience you had ever skated in front of?

Mimi Knoop: Honestly, at that time, I think, no, I remember the stands being pretty empty. Our contests in those years were held before the doors were open a lot of times. So, there wouldn't even be people in the stands. Maybe your mom and dad or friends that you invited, but the public, they'd be like, doors open at noon and then they'd have a contest at 10:00 or 11:00 in the morning or directly after the doors open, so no one's really in there.

Lizzie Peabody: Why did they schedule you before the doors open?

Mimi Knoop: That's a question you should ask ESPN. And those guys, I have no idea.

Chris Stiepock: I don't really know the specifics with what Mimi was talking about, but we tended to have everything open all the time.

Lizzie Peabody: X Games boss, Chris Stiepock.

Chris Stiepock : Our hours would be 11:00 AM to 8:00 PM. And with skateboarding, one of the disciplines was the vert ramp. There's only so many competitions we can put on the vert ramp during the course of the day. You want to put the competitions that you feel have the best opportunity to rate with an audience. And when you've got Tony Hawk on a vert ramp, that means men's skateboarding is going to get a good time slot.

Lizzie Peabody: And not only were the female skaters relegated to a bad time slot, they weren't put on TV at all. So, Mimi's family couldn't really share the moment with her.

Mimi Knoop: At the time, we kept being promised TV coverage. You guys are going to be on TV this time, and then it would never happen. My family's from the East Coast and getting an invite

the week before made it really tough for them to be able to come and support and be a part of it too. So, we just felt overlooked a lot.

Lizzie Peabody: And it's worth saying again, these are the world's best female skateboarders at the world's biggest skateboarding event, but they felt the X Games didn't respect them as professionals because they were women. And 2003 and 2004 and 2005 didn't look much better.

Mimi Knoop: In 2005, men's first place was 50 grand and women's was 2 grand.

Lizzie Peabody: Wow. Wow. That's 50. Five-zero-thousand dollars for the men.

Mimi Knoop: Yes. 50. Five-zero grand. Yeah.

Lizzie Peabody: For context, the last place male skater earned \$2,000, which is the same amount as the first place female skater. Mimi remembers this really frustrating story from one of her first X Games. There was a male skateboarder who attended the X Games, but didn't compete.

Mimi Knoop: He just sat there and smoked cigarettes. So, he ended up getting two grand for doing nothing.

Lizzie Peabody: What?!

Mimi Knoop: And that's where it really became polarizing for us. And we're like, dude, this is not cool.

Lizzie Peabody: Not cool. So, heading into the 2005 X Games, Knoop and Burnside made a plan to grab the attention of Stiepoek and the X Games organizers, so they might finally get the equal treatment they deserved. Coming up, after a quick break.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, it's spring 2005 and the world's best female skateboarders are fed up with the X Games. Their gripes were numerous and they were legit. If Cara-Beth Burnside was Martin Luther, here's the list she'd be nailing to ESPN's door. Number one, earlier notice on X Games invitations. Number two, some, any time on television. Three, most of all, prize money that was more than 4% the size of men's prizes. 4%. Things were unfair, but one fateful day, Mimi got a call from her mom.

Mimi Knoop: My mom went back to college. Well, she went to college in her fifties and Drew came in, he was one of the guest speakers.

Lizzie Peabody: She's talking about Drew Mearns. He's a big-time sports agent. In a way, he's like the Cara-Beth Burnside of his field.

Drew Mearns: For a period of 10 years, I represented every single winner of the New York City Marathon and the Boston Marathon.

Lizzie Peabody: So, Drew gave a presentation to Mimi's mom's class. And afterwards she went up to him and said...

Mimi Knoop's Mom: "Hey, can you help my daughter? She's trying to be a professional skateboarder." That's how I met Drew.

Drew Mearns: Originally, the meeting was about how Mimi could make money.

Mimi Knoop: And he, from the get-go, was like, who else is involved? How has your sport structured? He was just fascinated by how things worked and...

Lizzie Peabody: Drew didn't know much about skateboarding, but he knew the business of sports. So, he understood Mimi's problem, as an athlete who was being undervalued.

Drew Mearns: The men at the X Games were making \$50,000 for first prize and the women were getting \$1,000, or at the most \$2,000. That seemed like it was back in my 1960s or 1970s. So, that's how it all started.

Lizzie Peabody: Drew was in. So, Knoop and Burnside and the other female skateboarders headed into the 2005 X Games irritated. But this time they had a plan. On the evening of August 3rd, the skaters were hanging in their hotel room, talking things over. The first women's skateboarding event was scheduled to start the next day. And they decided not to show up.

Mimi Knoop: We actually didn't call to boycott. We just decided not to show up.

Drew Mearns: And so, what we did is, I said, "Look, just don't show up."

Mimi Knoop: And of course, the phone started ringing.

Drew Mearns: I was getting calls like crazy because they were saying, "Mearns, we know you. What do you want? Is it, you want money? You want... ?" No, we don't want anything.

Mimi Knoop: There are some pretty crazy voicemails left on Cara-Beth's phone that morning. Get down here, you guys are done, kind of thing.

Drew Mearns: "I just want to sit down with you after this event and talk about how we can bring the girls towards equal pay, better situation, different events", whatever we want to do.

Mimi Knoop: It wasn't like we were like, pay us right now. It wasn't like that. We were like, we want a meeting. We want to have a voice in our own events. There's some serious gaps here and we want to be involved.

Lizzie Peabody: And he exasperated X Games organizers said...

Mimi Knoop: "Let's do it. If you guys can get the girls to show up, we'll give you a meeting."

Drew Mearns: "Okay, we'll do it. Just make sure the girls show up." And they did.

Mimi Knoop: So, the women's street skaters showed up. They skated their event. The very next day we had our women's vert contests and we showed up, skated.

Lizzie Peabody: The X Games got their event, as promised. And the skaters waited for their call from the organizers.

Mimi Knoop: And then crickets. Crickets for almost a year after that.

Lizzie Peabody: For a good chunk of the year, silence. And then in June 2006, with the next X Games just a few weeks away, the organizer said, let's talk. For backup, Drew called around his sports agent circles and linked up with the head of the Women's Sports Foundation and asked her to come along as well. So, the day of the meeting arrives. Everyone gathers in the ESPN boardroom in New York City. And Drew remembered someone from the X Games explaining why women's skateboarding didn't look good on TV.

Drew Mearns: And he goes, "Well, women, when they go off the vert ramp, they only go up two or three feet. They don't do the same kind of tricks as the boys. And that's the reason. So that's why nobody watches."

Lizzie Peabody: We asked Stiepock about that and he said, "Yeah, sounds about right."

Chris Stiepock: I can definitely imagine somebody saying that. So, I've heard that many times. It could have been a producer who's responsible for shooting good television. For a long time, that was the elephant in the room. The girls just hadn't gotten very good yet, but by '05 and '06, they had.

Lizzie Peabody: To hear someone from the X Games say basically, "Well, their tricks aren't as good as the men's", isn't exactly the answer Drew's crew was looking for. But then the CEO of the Women's Sports Foundation asks...

Drew Mearns: "Well, why do you think that is?" And that's where I think that the collective ESPN male-dominated X Games stuff made a mistake. He just said, "Everybody knows that women don't want to try too hard to jump big things, they're afraid of getting hurt."

Lizzie Peabody: What?! For what it's worth. Stiepock says he doesn't remember anyone saying that and he doesn't believe anyone from ESPN would have said that in a meeting.

Chris Stiepock: I don't think somebody would say that they're afraid to get hurt, that's just sheer ignorance. And if somebody had said that in a meeting setting with outside people, they would've gotten verbally reprimanded afterwards, I believe.

Lizzie Peabody: Either way, for whatever reason after the meeting, Drew's phone rang. It was John Skipper, a senior executive at ESPN, basically Stiepock's boss, who all of a sudden was very interested in the changes requested by Mimi and Cara-Beth. He asked them for a meeting at the upcoming X Games. John Skipper invited them to his luxury box at the Staple Center. Mimi remembers the meeting's tone being friendly.

Mimi Knoop: He is a really nice guy. He was like, "Look, I'm sorry we didn't come through on this promise to you guys. How can I help you, basically?" And we asked for three things from him. We asked for an increase in prize money over a few years' span and then equal purses. And we asked for increased media exposure.

Lizzie Peabody: Television, photographers. Basically, they wanted equality.

Mimi Knoop: And then the third thing we asked for was we want to organize our own events.

Lizzie Peabody: Essentially, the female skateboarding events felt like they were an afterthought to the X Games organizers. So, the skateboarders would do it themselves.

Mimi Knoop: He said, "Well, what do you guys want the purse to be this year? What's an amount we can come up with that everyone will be stoked on?" And he said 10 grand for first or something. I wrote 15 down on a piece of paper and sold it to Cara-Beth and she was like "15." So, we have a joke, he approved it and we have a joke now, I'm like, "Dude, you owe me five grand, I got you five grand that day." Because she won the next day.

Lizzie Peabody: Burnside took home 15 grand for winning at the 2006 X Games. Not equality, but it was a good first step. The prize money went up again the following year and on October 27th, 2008, the X Games announced that men and women would earn equal prize money. Not just in skateboarding, but in every sport. After years of no pay, low pay and being dismissed, Cara-Beth Burnside and Mimi Knoop earned equal pay for female skateboarders. And today, both are still working hard to make the sport better. In their own way. Cara-Beth Burnside, the two-sports star who won eight X Games medals over 14 years, coaches girls and boys in skateboarding and still skates herself in her free time. And as for Mimi Knoop, well, she's now the coach of the first ever U.S. Women's Olympic skateboarding team. The sport was set to make its debut at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo but the games have been pushed back to the summer of 2021.

Mimi Knoop: We've all been on an emotional roller coaster with the schedule change, the pandemic. Mostly I feel for our skaters, the ones that are ranked really high right now, the top of their game. Now, they have to wait a whole another year and hope they keep that position,

but we're continuing to keep the culture of skateboarding solid and just trying to enhance their experience with this whole thing.

Lizzie Peabody: And together, along with Drew Mearns, they created the Action Sports Alliance to continue to empower and develop future generations of female skateboarders. And the Smithsonian's own Betsy Gordon says she's seen slow but steady growth in the skateboarding industry.

Beth Gordon: It hasn't been until very, very recently that women have been getting sponsorships, shoes, boards, grip tape wheels. And it's shocking to me that it's taken that industry so long to embrace young women and women's skating.

Lizzie Peabody: It's taken time, but today, skateboarding has become a fairer place for women. And even as the X Games did the right thing, Gordon says that there are still battles ahead for the next generation of female athletes. But unlike when Knoop and Burnside were growing up, this generation can see it's been done before and they know what's possible. That was the story we originally aired in summer 2020. And now it's 2021 and the moment is here. The Olympics are upon us. So, back at the National Museum of American History, I asked Jane Rogers, how might the Olympics affect women's skateboarding in particular?

Jane Rogers: Women's skateboarding is really excelling right now. There's a lot of women skateboarding. So, I think it's only going to get bigger with a bigger audience. I think people are going to say, "Hey, I could do that." I mean, if I can, at 55, get on a skateboard and glide down the street and not kill myself, obviously I'm not going to be in the Olympics, but I mean, if you're a 12 year old girl and you see these other young girls doing this sport, hey, why can't I try? I can go down to my local skate shop and get a skateboard and jump on.

Lizzie Peabody: A lot more girls are going to see women skateboarding in a very high level.

Jane Rogers: Yes. Right. I think it'll have a big impact.

Lizzie Peabody: Anything that you would encourage our audience to look for at the Olympics? What are you most excited for?

Jane Rogers: I'm most excited for the women's competition. I think that's going to be really, really heated. There's some amazing women skaters out there. So be sure to watch them.

Lizzie Peabody: I will.

Jane Rogers: Yeah.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: You've been listening to an Olympic bonus edition of Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: If you want to see some skateboards used by pioneering female skateboarders from the 1960s and 70s, they're at the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC. And if you're not in town, check out the photos on our website, si.edu/sidedoor. You can also follow us on social media @sidedoorpod.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Big thanks to Mimi Knoop, Cara-Beth Burnside, Jane Rogers, Tim Reed, Grace Correale, Betsy Gordon, Chris Stiepock, Sarah Axelson and Patty Bifulco of the Women's Sports Foundation and an extra special thanks to Drew Mearns.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: We have sad news to share that since the episode originally aired in 2020, Drew Mearns has died. It was an honor to be able to speak with him and hear him tell this story and we could not have done it without him.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This show is produced by Justin O'Neill, James Morrison, Nathalie Boyd, Ann Conanan, Caitlin Shaffer, Jess Sadeq, Lara Koch, Sharon Bryant and Tami O'Neill. Episode artwork is by Greg Fisk. Extra support comes from Jason and Genevieve at PRX. Our show is mixed by Tarek Fouda. Our theme song and other episode music are by Breakmaster Cylinder.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: If you want to sponsor our show, please email sponsorship@prx.org.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: I'm your host, Lizzie Peabody. Thanks for listening and enjoy the Olympics.