

New Olympic and Paralympic Sports to Ramp Up the Thrills

Skateboarding and Para Taekwondo will make their debut on the world's biggest stage.

by **Stephan Jarvis**



Kicking and kick-flipping their way onto the Olympic and Paralympic program, the debut events of skateboarding and Para Taekwondo, in addition to sport climbing, surfing, and Para Badminton, and the reinstating of baseball/softball and karate, are being highly anticipated for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. New events always draw an extra level of interest from the media and public, and with the spectacular energy, action, and remarkable skill on display in these two particular sports, they look certain to be both exciting and worthy additions.

Skateboarding's image as a counter-culture sport has undergone a transformation since the 1990s. It is thought that in Japan, the number of children and parents getting involved with the sport has increased. That is because many of the riders from the 1980s boom generation have become parents themselves and are passing down their skills and knowledge.

The organizers of the Tokyo 2020 Games are hoping to nurture this increasing popularity by embracing the vibrant, youth-focused, carnival atmosphere that is associated with the sport. The skateboarding events will take place at the brand new, bayside Ariake Urban Sports Park—a facility that aims to deliver a more dynamic and

For the first time, the best skateboarders in the world will be competing for an Olympic gold medal, at the Tokyo 2020 Games.

engaging experience for fans. It will also serve as a symbol of the efforts made in making the Tokyo 2020 Games in general more appealing to a younger audience.

Two disciplines of skateboarding are on the program: street and park, including both men's and women's events. The faster, more original, and complex performances are awarded the higher overall scores. Street takes place in an arena with an assortment of stairs, rails, benches, walls, and slopes, similar to those found throughout a typical city, upon which individual competitors can display their repertoire of tricks and skills. As riders skillfully chain together an awe-inspiring combination of moves, it is an impressive spectacle to watch. Park, which combines a dome-shaped bowl and a variety of complex curves, gives riders more of an incentive to perform mid-air execution of tricks. Free-flowing around a curved, hollowed-out course, riders can gain immense speed, leading to higher jumps and the opportunity to pull off more complex moves. The sight of riders grabbing their boards at the peak of a jump, twisting and spinning their bodies as they do, is a thrilling master class in bravery and commitment, and seeing them manage a successful landing further heightens the tension and excitement.

More lower limb dexterity will be on display during the Para Taekwondo events over at Makuhari Messe—one of the largest convention halls in Japan, located adjacent to Tokyo in Chiba Prefecture. Taekwondo, the Korean national sport that combines martial arts with sporting competition, already has Olympic pedigree, having been made an official Olympic sport during the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. The Tokyo 2020 Games will provide opportunities for Paralympic athletes to display their mastery of the fast-kicking martial art on the stage for the first time.

Para Taekwondo was only established in 2005 and held its first World Championship in 2009. There are two versions of the sport: *Kyorugi*, for athletes with upper limb

impairments, and *Poomsae*, for those with intellectual impairments. Only *Kyorugi* will be on the 2020 program, with athletes divided into different classes depending on weight and the level of physical impairment.

Unlike in regular taekwondo, which allows kicks to the head, kicks to the body are the only way to score points in Para Taekwondo. However, the incentive of a special four-point award for landing a successful, but difficult to pull off, 360-degree spinning kick on an opponent is set to ramp up the excitement. (Two points are awarded to regular kicks and three points for 180-degree kicks.)



Para Taekwondo displays power and skill.

With the eyes of the world on them next summer, the respective governing bodies of skateboarding and Para Taekwondo are hopeful that the thrills and excitement on offer will work wonders for their popularity levels, and provide opportunities for more growth and development beyond the Tokyo 2020 Games.