

Meet Arizona Snowbowl's Pro-Snowboarding Pioneer Brian Harper

Written by Nadine Toren

Television personality and AZfoothills.com columnist Nadine Toren is scouring the area, finding savvy Valley features, bringing readers "on the scene." Every day she'll introduce you to [celebrities](#), athletes, and give you an inside look into local events and hot spots. She'll touch on topical issues, and keep AZ fans posted on all the big talkers around town.



It was 1986 when Brian Harper first hit the slopes.

The now 42 year old considers himself one of Arizona's original snowboarders, because this former pro-boarder took to the sport at a time when many thought it was just a fad.

He was born and raised in Flagstaff, but until 18-years-old, Harper never had the chance to test-drive "shredding the gnarr."

Instead, he spent his spare time skateboarding; that's because even though Flagstaff saw a seasonal winter wonderland, his high school did not offer winter sports at the time.

However, Harper could not resist being drawn to the snow, so once out of school, he traveled a chair-lift for the very first time, and easily picked up the sport at Flagstaff's Arizona Snowbowl.

"You could skateboard in the winter, that's how I looked at it. Everything was so new; we were basically the snowboarding pioneers of Arizona," said Brian Harper, owner of California Ramp Works.

Our Arizona pioneer now runs California Ramp Works, the exclusive ramp-builder for the Summer X-Games.

But before Harper took to tools, he mastered snowboarding.

"In the spring of '87, I went to Breckenridge, Colorado and actually won the World Amateur Half-Pipe Championship," said Harper.

That was only the beginning.

The champ continued to win numerous competitions as he traveled the world, courtesy of his Sims' sponsorship. Harper's forte was rocking the half-pipe, snowboarding slopes only pros would often frequent.

"It was completely the American dream to travel with a group of friends that all did the same thing as you, and actually get paid for it. Plus, we got to see the world. It was awesome."

Harper lived his dream for more than ten years, but like many young, fresh up-and-coming stars, he says it went by too fast.

"When you're that age you take everything for granted. I never took the time to take advantage of my travels."

In his later years of boarding, Harper says he realized he better figure out a plan B. Snowboarding was vastly gaining popularity and many success-stories only experienced a short-lived career.

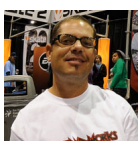
So Harper decided to utilize a skill he learned as a kid.

"I always built skateboard ramps in my backyard and ramps for friends."

Throughout his final competitions, Harper built the jumps for any given contest.

One thing led to another, and he began to pick up big-time work.

His talent soon became a career, and now he co-runs California Ramp Works, his Mesa-based company in charge of all the ramps for large scale events like the X-Games, The Dew Tour, and The LG Action Sports Tour.



But despite his demanding schedule, our home-town guy has not forgotten where he's from.

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"Many people can't believe I'm a snowboarder from Arizona, but believe it or not, several influential people started at Snowbowl."

Harper tributes his career to Arizona Snowbowl, located in the Coconino National Forest on the stunning San Francisco Peaks.

Hop in the car and take the two-hour ride from Phoenix to Snowbowl, just minutes from the heart of Flagstaff.

The facility opened in 1938, making it one of the country's oldest continually run ski destinations in the United States. The winter sports park is known for its friendly beginner terrain, but if you're like Harper, you can surf the snow on the Bowl's many challenging trails.

It's the homey hotspot where you can still find Harper, now boarding along-side his wife and two daughters.

They're the same Arizona Snowbowl slopes he boarded at 18-years-old, and he says those memories of the good-old-days will forever remain dear to his heart.

"It means everything to me. It's funny; most people there today were there when I started in the 80s. The General Manger, the head of ski patrol, the maintenance manager; I go up and see them. They pretty much have helped me get where I am today."



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