



Blasting a big Backside Judo air in the pool at Carlsbad's Alga Norte Skatepark (photo by J. Grant Brittain).

# DEFYING GRAVITY

**YOUNG AND ACCOMPLISHED  
SKATEBOARDER JOEY YARBROUGH  
HAS THE DROP-IN DIALED IN.**

*WRITTEN BY WENDY HENMAN*



Good athletes make their sport look easy to the novice or spectator. What Joey Yarbrough does on a skateboard is what Coco Gauff does with a tennis racket. Joey's ollies and grinds look so effortless, like a hot knife through butter, you'd be tempted to think you could do what she does. When Joey drops in, her lines are fluid and easy, steezy.

Oh, and she's 12. Joey's first competition was at age 5 with Exposure Skate. Right now, this is the summer between sixth and seventh grade. Joey attends Coastal Academy, to give herself flex. She competes about six times a year, plus demos. To say she is an up-and-comer in park and vert skating is as much an understatement as it is a pun for a girl who hasn't even gained her full physical height. Her first international skate competition was The World Skate Games last year in Rome. (World Skate is the official Olympic qualifying body for street and park skateboarding. Joey is a park skater and part of the USOPC delegation). She doesn't skate in an age category anymore because she's ready to take on the top of the decks.

### LEARNING IN LEGACY

"Cultural legacies are powerful forces," Malcolm Gladwell wrote in his book "Outliers." "They have deep roots and long lives." Joey's roots are deep in Carlsbad. She was born into an extended surf/skate family. "Skateboarding," Danny Yarbrough, Joey's dad, says of the nascent days of the sport, "was what we did when the surf was flat or blown out. But it's always 5 feet and glassy at the skatepark. And no one is snaking your waves." In the 1970s and '80s, surfing and skateboarding boomed into major industries. Back then, in the lineup at Tamarack or turning mad props at the Escondido Reservoir, you could usually find a Yarbrough. Danny was the youngest of the clan, who were a continual presence at Carlsbad High in the '70s: Tom (class of '74), Rena ('75), Mick ('76), Will ('77), skip a year, then Danny ('79).

If you started doing the math in your head, you may ask yourself how, at 63, does an old surf pro have a 12-year-old daughter? "I started late," Danny says. Late in getting married and late in leaving the surf industry to become an architect after a 10-year amateur and pro surfing career. He was in his early 40s when he met Madoka standing in line for a surf movie at La Paloma. They've been married for 18 years and Joey is their only child.

Kids growing up don't necessarily follow their parents' vocations; they follow their passions, what makes them happy. In this place, where there are actually com-



a) Throwing down a Madonna on her way to a fifth-place finish in the Pro Women's Vert Final at X Games at the 2024 U.S. Open of Surfing in Huntington Beach (photo by Marc Wierenga). b) Flashing a big smile after winning the 2023 World Cup Open Women's Pro Division at the Orchid Ramp in Goleta, CA (photo courtesy of the Yarbrough family). c) Joey doing a Hurricane on her way to a ninth-place finish at the 2024 Tony Hawk's Vert Alert in Salt Lake City (photo courtesy of THVA @thvertalert). d) Joey with her first skateboard. e) Her first lesson was at the Exposure Skate Rising free clinic for girls in Encinitas at the ripe age of 18 months. f) Joey and her dad Danny after signing around 250 decks each at the El Gato Legends Contest in La Quinta, CA, 2023. Joey competed in the Generations event, which was a four-person team event where upcoming men and women skaters teamed up with Vert and Transition skateboarding legends and current top pros (photos courtesy of the Yarbrough family).





petitions for kids at a very young age, and with that extended family—where you might hear feats of aggro shred around the holiday table—Joey had what some people call accumulative advantage.

CARVING THE NOW

Even with that advantage, aptitude needs habitude. “I still surf a little,” Joey says. “But I mostly just skate now.” It was the friends that drew her in. She describes the camaraderie, the fun of cheering each other on. Listening to SZA, Nikki Minaj or Kendrick Lamar as they dance across the concrete.

If we are who we hang with, Joey’s friends are major influences. The list reads like a Who’s Who of skateboarding’s Olympians, World Skate international competitors and X Gamers: Arisa Trew, Jada Ward, Bryce Wettstein, Amelia Bródka, Lady Meek and Ruby Lilley are just a few. Joey was not yet 12 when she landed her first 540. Wettstein was there with a hug and a smile. “We congratulate each other,” Joey says of these friends when they are competing with each other. “We push each other.”

That level of competition is not without its internal tensions. Joey thinks pressure helps. “Joey has a knack,” Danny says, “for pulling it together because of the pressure.” Of her process she says, “You don’t really show up to a new course completely unaware.” Joey learns about a park in advance, looking at photos, studying YouTube videos, finding a line. “It really helps to use visualization to work on lines.”

“It’s not so fun when you can’t land a trick,” she says. Like a baseball batter in a slump, she says she can get stuck. “It’s frustrating because you are so close; your body is not the same as your mind.” But when she lands it, the world wobbles with new possibilities.

Any action sport athlete worth her salt mentions the sponsors who outfit them. Joey’s are Etnies for shoes, Dickies for skate clothing, Sambazon for fuel, Arbor for decks, Slappy Truck Company for Trucks, Bones for wheels and bearings, Killer 187 and Protec for pads and helmets to soften falls, Nixon to keep time and Raen to shade the sun. And even at such a young age, “Joey is one of the original Old Bros,” Danny says. Her coach is Trev Ward of LV-LUP Academy. This all is also an accumulative advantage.

At this writing, Joey is in Rome at the World Skate World Cup again. Of course she wants to make an Olympic team because who wouldn’t? She’ll be at the Tony Hawk Vert Alert next month in Salt Lake City, the World Skate World Championships in D.C. in September and always hopes to repeat an X Games. “You have to choose the most important ones for you,” Danny says. Even though skating is in her bloodline and despite the pressure of competitions, Joey says it’s the stoke that propels her career, it’s landing a new trick that sets the verve and the fun of it all that takes her the distance.



a) Joey with Olympian and Exposure Skate Co-Founder Amelia Brodka. b) (from left) Juno Matsuoka, Joey and her mom Madoka at the Exposure Skate competition (photos courtesy of theYarbrough family). c-e) Joey hitting a Backside Judo Air, aBackside Hurricane and a Backside Air at Poods (photos by Lance Smith).