

## “It’s basically extreme alpine roller derby”

Humorist Jay Dyckman reflects on why he loves watching snowboard cross.

BY JAY DYCKMAN

**W**ITH JUST ABOUT every kind of athletic endeavor being called “extreme” these days — extreme shuffleboard, anyone? — I heartily endorse snowboard cross,

a winter sport that is so extreme it ought to be illegal.

When it debuted at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Turin, snowboard cross gave a wedgie to Games known mainly for events featuring a



**Snowboarders hurtle down a mountain track in a kamikaze race.**

“kiss and cry” area (figure skating) and competitors clad in Lycra unitards sweeping an ice court with the intensity of Joan Crawford (curling).

For the uninitiated, allow me to draw a picture: A group of snowboarders hurtles down a weaving mountain track in a kamikaze race to reach the finish line first. That’s it. As far as I can tell, there are no rules in snowboard cross. It consists of a mix of fearless will, peak athleticism, cunning strategy and several Class C felonies.

As I watched American Seth Wescott outlast the prison riot that was quickly closing in behind him before he went on to earn the gold medal in Turin, I realized why I love this sport so much. Basically, snowboard cross is alpine roller derby. And to me, roller derby is up there with modern democracy in terms of America’s contribution to world culture. While I was growing up in the San Francisco area, following the Bay City Bombers was one of my TV obsessions. I place Charlie O’Connell and Joanie Weston on the same level as Ali, Aaron and Jordan. And because roller derby has about as much chance of becoming an Olympic event as squirrel juggling, it fills me with joy to watch the

WESCOTT: AGENCY ZOOM/GETTY; SNOWBOARDERS: MICHELLE LIMINA, AP/WIDEWORLD

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- **2008 Chevrolet U.S. Snowboard Grand Prix**  
Feb. 8-10  
Tamarack, Idaho

psychotic athletes of snowboard cross stain the slopes red.

Yet there is room for improvement. The sport's governing body (a bunch of 14-year-old boys?) should take the next logical step and just arm everyone at the top of the hill. Before each race, officials could haul out a canvas sack of weapons from the board game *Clue* — rope, candlestick, lead pipe and so on — and make it a big grab bag. Play along with your friends! I'll take Colonel Canada, with the wrench, by 2 seconds.

So rumble on, snowboard crossers. There's no need to kiss and cry when it's all over. **W**

JAY DYCKMAN last wrote about the public menace posed by baby strollers.

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