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Boarding and ready for takeoffs downtown

'Dew' athletes, fans relish their air ways

BY **BILL ORDINE**
SUN REPORTER

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Bucky Lasek, at 34 the patriarch of Baltimore skateboarding, tried to ignore a bum left knee yesterday and gritted his way through the preliminary round of the skateboard vert event at the AST Dew Tour's Panasonic Open being held at the Camden Yards sports complex.

Moments later, 9-year-old Joseph Hornish, aka Joey Jett, of Towson was nimbly swooping into the same giant half-pipe as one of the privileged "groms" on the tour.

It was an X Games meets Circle of Life moment. Dundalk native Lasek, facing arthroscopic knee surgery Monday, is in the twilight of his celebrated career. Hornish, tiny and wiry, is fortunate enough to be one of a handful of little kids (groms) who will perform on the five-stop tour and already is getting free skateboard shoes from sponsors.

Together, though, they helped give some local flavor to Baltimore's stop on the action sports tour, which is a combination of athletic event, rock concert and shredder lifestyle carnival.

In addition to skateboarding, the tour stop features bicycle motocross (BMX) and freestyle motocross (FMX) riding. Three separate event venues have been set up around the stadium where the Ravens play as well as a carnival-style

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interactive "village" where kids can try their hand at tamer versions of the three action sports disciplines.

Lasek, who now lives in California, managed to advance to today's finals in his event, something he desperately wanted to do in front of his Baltimore fans.

"There's the pressure of being in my hometown," Lasek said. And, of course, he has been the face of skateboarding in Baltimore for nearly two decades and helped promote the tour stop here.

"Now, I'm hurt and I'm basically skating on one leg," he said.

In the same event is Olympic gold-medal winner Shaun White, who with his shock of untamed red hair became a counterculture national sports hero last year as the first-place finisher in snowboarding at the Turin Games.

White is splitting his time between the two sports - three months boarding on wheels and the rest of the year on snow.

"I'm doing this because it's super fun, it keeps me in shape during the summer and it makes me appreciate snowboarding more because when I get tired of doing one thing, it's time to do the other one," White said.

Young fans attending the action sports event are able to split their time between watching and participating. At the interactive village's skateboard park, small motocross track and BMX course, kids donned the appropriate safety gear and did some shredding of their own.

Shamaar Martin, 10, of Columbia successfully navigated the moguls and hairpin U-turn of the BMX course but admitted he had an advantage. He has a BMX bike and a mini motorcycle at home.

"His father," explained his mother, Joanie Bain.

As far as his favorite among the action sports, Shamaar singled out the motocross. "It's exciting," he explained, "and they make a lot of noise."

For anyone over 30, the interactive village may have had the familiar feel of any other carnival but with some twists. One of the more popular stops was the PlayStation pavilion, where visitors could try out the latest in virtual ninja combat, major league baseball, all-terrain racing and, of course, skateboarding on the new PlayStation 3.

And rather than a booth where kids could get one those cute little tattoos on their face, there was an "xtreme barber shop" where the bravest could opt for a mohawk - dyed green.

Matt Darr, 19, of Glen Burnie took the plunge, getting his already close-cropped hair shorn on the sides and leaving a lime runway down the middle.

Asked how that would go over at home, Darr was nonchalant, saying he was sure his girlfriend wouldn't mind and that "at work I wear a hat anyway."

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Among the athletes participating as well as the spectators, there is an unmistakable sense of living in the now. That was apparent when it was mentioned to White, the snowboard Olympian, that his pursuit of two sports mirrored Bo Jackson's double career in the NFL and major league baseball.

White stared for a moment and said, "Who?"

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