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Today's Edition

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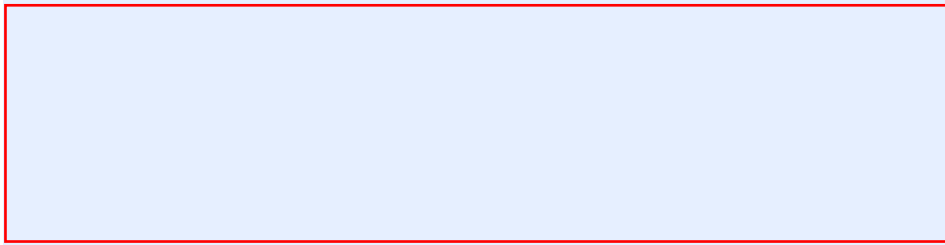
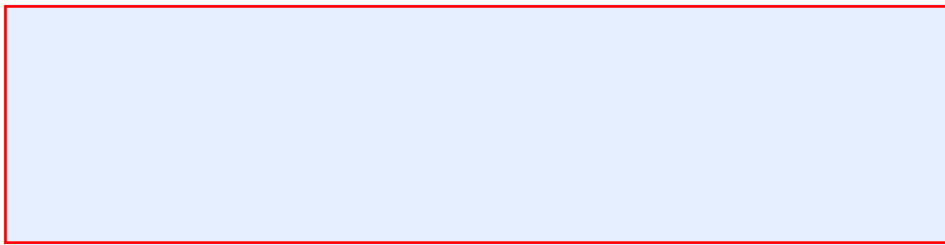
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They call him Little Tricky

Preschooler skateboards with the big dogs

By ELIZABETH GILLESPIE, Associated Press writer

Mitchie Brusco of Seattle, Wash., can't tie his shoes yet and won't start kindergarten until next year, but he does a mean pop shove-it on his pint-sized skateboard and is already competing with the big dogs.

At 5 years old, this kid they call "Little Tricky" was the youngest to compete in the Gravity Games Amateur Skatepark Series in Cleveland.

He weighs 43 pounds, stands 43 inches tall -- not quite twice the length of his board -- and can land tricks that kids three times his age can't.

"He's phenomenal," said Peter Carlisle, director of Olympic and action sports for Octagon, a sports agency. "It is incredible to see him put down a sippie cup and then go do these incredible things on a skateboard."

Several companies are already sponsoring Mitchie, who lives with his mom, dad and four siblings in suburban Kirkland.

Jones Soda Co. gives him free drinks, stickers and fake tattoos. DC Shoes sends him a new pair of sneakers every month. Termite gives him skateboards. Triple Eight Protective Gear gives him pads for his elbows and knees.

Each company is listed on his business card: Mitchie Brusco, Amateur Skateboard Teams.

He's appeared in magazine ads and skateboard videos. There's even a "Little Tricky" skateboard sold out of The Skate Key, a shop run by a friend of the Bruscos in Centralia, Wash.

"When you have a kid like Mitchie, you can only shield them so much," said Carlisle, who represents Mitchie and the Bruscos pro bono, giving them advice on how to handle the flood of offers they get week by week. "What you try to do, is help them figure out how to navigate their way through it without adversely affecting Mitchie. All they want is for Mitchie to be happy."



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By the looks of things, it's working. "We're really being careful," said his mother, Jennifer Brusco, a former professional baseball player with the Colorado Silver Bullets who's now a stay-at-home mom. "We've turned down a bunch of offers just because he's 5, and it's supposed to be fun."

Paul Swangard, managing director of the Warsaw Sports Marketing Center in the University of Oregon's business school, says he sees more companies keeping a closer eye on promising young athletes.

"The way the sports industry has evolved, it's like prospecting for the next great stock," Swangard said. "You kind of hope this is the one who will be the next Tony Hawk, but the reality is, the chances of that are very small."

"You have to worry for our industry if this becomes a more common practice," he added. "At what point can't we just simply enjoy the pureness of sport and let these kids be kids?"

Mitchie has four siblings -- Jessica, 12; Mikie, 11; Alexandra, 8; and Nicole, 3 -- and while all of them are athletic, he's the only one who's taken to skateboarding.

It all started two years ago, when he spotted a row of skateboards while walking through a department store with his mom and said he just had to have one.

"I don't know if he saw the Tasmanian devil or the skateboard, but it started and it hasn't stopped," Jennifer Brusco said.

He coasts up and down ramps wearing a helmet plastered with pictures of his brothers, sisters and grandparents. Sometimes he lands his tricks. Sometimes he takes a spill. Either way, he's usually off his board only as long as it takes to get right back on.

His parents have a video that shows him trying to land a jump off a flight of stairs. He falls six times in a row, barely hangs on the seventh time, then nails it solid on his eighth try.

Those who know him say the tenacity is all his.

"His mom is very cool and calm and not pushy," said Patty Seder, founder and director of the 400-member Pacific Northwest Amateur Skateboard League. "She doesn't demand that he get out and skate. They go when he wants to go. It's not the soccer mom from hell type of thing, and I don't see that very often."

Every now and then after a hard fall or getting whacked in the shin by an errant skateboard, he does what most 5-year-olds do and cries -- a lot.

"When he gets banged up on something, it'll take him a while to try it again," said his father, Mick, a salesman for a lumber company.

But his hesitation doesn't usually last long.

"He's quite the daredevil," said Sandy Seeger, owner of The Skate Key and mother of Mitchie's 12-year-old best friend, Brandon. "Typically, a kid will stand at the top of a ramp and say, 'Oh, that's too steep,' but he just hits it."

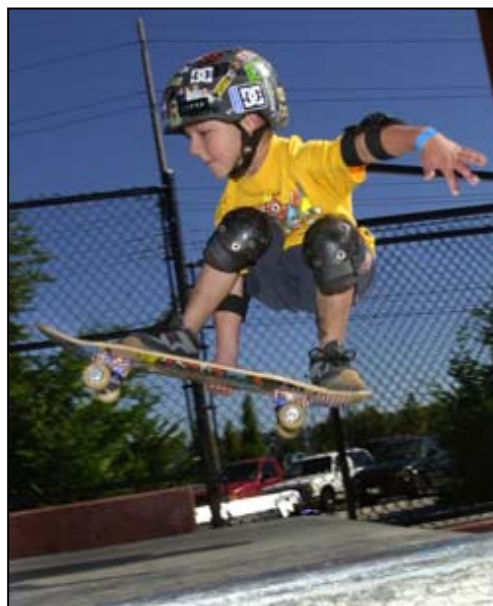
He's made enough of a name for himself that he's grown used to signing autographs. He showed his stuff on NBC's "Today" show in early August soon after the fourth annual Gravity Games, paying more attention to the ramps than to host Matt Lauer.

He placed 13th out of 14 who competed in the Gravity Games' amateur skatepark series, which airs Sunday on NBC. The next oldest competitor was 12. Another Seattle-area kid, 16-year-old Aaron Johnson of Tacoma, took first place and says Mitchie's moves impress him.

"Most kids start skateboarding when they're 10 or 12 years old," Johnson said, "and he's already doing big things."

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