

## From the Publisher

### Craig Coker aims high in creating 'War of the Rails'

Most people welcomed the two-foot dump that greeted Big Bear Lake that February Saturday last year. I know I did, visions of porpoising through powder dancing in my head like sugarplums at Christmas.

Not Craig Coker. He looked up and what I saw as play, he saw as trouble. Clouds of white were only storm clouds of disaster in this event promoter's eyes. The Big Bear local-turned-pro skier knew those fluffy flakes floating from above would pile up to spell doom for his second annual "War of the Rails."

On any other day some of the best freeskiers around, assembled to compete for \$15,000 in cold hard cash, would relish a two-foot dump. But not when there's sick riling to be done, because the best tricks require lots of speed which comes on firm, hard snow, not fluffy piles of deep. Leave the deep in the trees to be enjoyed later; get the white stuff packed down in The Scene at Bear for one of skiing's best events in Southern California.

Try as Park Staff might it just couldn't keep up with the snowfall. Sunday was forecast to be the bluebird day, so the obvious solution was to move the War back a day. Except Coker's event insurance expired at midnight Saturday.

"That Saturday, I was running around like a chicken with my head cut off, trying to get hold of insurance people on a weekend," Coker said. "Finally I got someone who shot over the insurance certificate to Bear." And the next day, under panoramic Big Bear blue skies, top freeskiers from Utah, Colorado, the East Coast and California put on the season's best show.

When "War of the Rails" returns on February 24-26 for its third engagement, Coker's ready for anything. "I'm a lot more prepared because I think we may have another big storm," he said. "It's been a dry early season so far so we'll be prepared for a big storm with a snow day built in."

Friday sees an amateur competition with the top 15 finalists qualifying for a berth in Saturday's pro event with an expanded \$20,000 purse, \$10,000 of which goes to the winner. Think that will draw any top freeskiers? If there's snow the schedule moves back a day to Sunday. If not the show hangs around to enjoy the park bounty at Bear, which a lot of these guys put to good use last year.

A year ago there was one title sponsor, Monster. In 2012 there's several, with Monster joined by Under Armor, Skull Candy Audio, Windells and Burton, which will be giving tons of free helmets away. With two events under his belt Coker, one of the few true Big Bear natives since he was born in the hospital here and raised locally, has turned "War of the Rails" into



the region's premier ski competition.

Largely because it's a ski event put on by a skier. "I'm drawing the course design to make sure it's nice," Coker said. "Being a retired professional skier I know what the skiers like and how it should be."

Which last year included an incredible 15 foot wall that looked like the Green Monster in Fenway Park. When Park Staff put it up on Friday I just assumed it was something for guys to bang off of...till I saw the rail on top and realized skiers would be sliding on it! I was only half-right, for some guys flew over it, 20 feet above the snow.

"I believe I'll bring it back into play, maybe even bigger," Coker said.

It's the kind of event Coker enjoyed during his 11-year pro career. He actually started out on a snowboard in Big Bear and learned all the tricks before donning a pair of Salomon 1080s, the revolutionary twin tip ski inspired by Mike Douglas that ignited the freeski movement.

"Snowboard tricks went right into freestyle," Coker said. "The rotations and stuff are close to the same. The first time I was seen by a movie company was at a Freeze photo shoot at Snow Summit on Westridge. Then I got in with Level One Productions which brought me on a couple trips." All of a sudden the Big Bear boy was skiing and filming in Switzerland, Germany and Sweden, and competing against the likes of Jon Olsson and Laurent Thevenet in events like the indoor London Ride contest in England.

All the switch back flips and 1080s took their toll on Coker. "I've had lots of broken bones on my feet and toes from stomping landings, collarbone, both knees have messed up MCLs," he said. "I've had five concussions that I know of, maybe more, and torn a couple muscles in my shoulders and ripped both toe nails off multiple times."

So Coker, 28, retired a couple years ago and now owns a computer repair business in San Diego, MobileMacFix.com. Wonder how he would fare in his own event? "I think I would be in the Top 15, so I would get a check, but who knows?" he said. "The tricks nowadays are pretty intense." As shown at "War of the Rails."

Have a good one.

  
Marcus

**ON THE COVER:** It's an aerial bombardment with top freeskiers getting huge air during the Feb. 24-26 "War of the Rails" at Bear Mountain —BBT Photo by Steve Dietz



## In This Issue...

### 4 Aerial Battle at 'War of the Rails'

The battle is definitely fought up high when Big Bear's own Craig Coker (story this page) holds the third annual "War of the Rails" at Bear Mountain February 24-26. Friday and Saturday are the big days as freeskiers from the western states compete for a whopping \$20,000 purse by soaring to incredible heights over insane features.

### 5 Resort Shorts: Happenings at Summit, Bear

XOS Winterfest and Battle of the Sexes gets the month off to a fast-paced start but there's a lot more happening at Snow Summit and Bear Mountain. Like a free Mac Miller concert, two "Go Huck Yourself" events, Salomon BBR demo weekends, and much more, all covered right here...

### 6 Bullwheel Bar Hits Bull's-eye with History

Take away the pretty cocktail servers and large screen TVs showing sports and the Bullwheel Bar upstairs at Snow Summit becomes a virtual ski museum with a half-century collection of artifacts and photos. Sip a Home Boy, listen to the Home Boys, and check out the old chair from the Lynn lift, early generation snowmaking hydrants and much more.

### 11 Races, Expo at 'Snowshoe the Bear'

It was definitely a good thing that organizers moved the annual "Snowshoe the Bear" event back three weeks in the hopes of getting a little more snow. Here's hoping the new date works better for those heading into the backcountry.

### 16 Sing Lead in a Band with 'Beyond Karaoke'

Join a live band to sing lead vocals for all your favorite hits in the ultimate karaoke experience lakeside at B's Boathouse. There's 160,000 hits to choose from in all musical genres so grab the wireless microphone in 'Beyond Karaoke'...there's bound to be a tune with your name on it.



Big Bear native Craig Coker hosts "War of the Rails" for freeskiers; see pages 2 and 4

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