

Community**now**

Skateboarder ramps up competitive profile

Fifteen-year-old Burnaby resident Oli Ward is ranked sixth in Canada for men's park skateboarding

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Skate fast and air high.

That's what local skateboarder 15-year-old Oli Ward wants to do.

Headed into Grade 11 at Burnaby North Secondary, Oli is ranked sixth in the country for men's park skateboarding.

The Burnaby teen has been skating for almost half his life, and Canada's national team considers him a top prospect for the Summer Olympics in 2028 and beyond.

Still, Oli is taking the success in stride, and his biggest priorities are to have fun with his friends and get better at skating.

SKATEBOARD BEGINNINGS

After his dad found an old skateboard in the garage when Oli was about eight years old, Oli started skating around the street with his sister in front of their grandfather's house in South Burnaby.

When the family moved to North Burnaby, he started skating at Confederation Park.

"I just found it real-

ly fun, and I found more friends who did it, and I just kept going to the skate park and wanting to learn more things."

When he was 11, Oli started competitions at Queen's Park in New West. He came in 15th place.

"I just did a bunch of random stuff, like air out of the bowl to flat, and stuff that you're not supposed to do," he said.

"I didn't really have that many proper tricks back then."

But after seeing "all the good guys come out to Queen's Park," he knew he wanted to level up.

Since then, Oli has placed on the podium at multiple local competitions: in the last month, he's won first place at the South Surrey Skatepark Bowl series, first at the Slurpee Canada Open in Winnipeg, first at the Seylunn Skate Bowl Series and sixth at the Slurpee Canada Open in Calgary.

Since February, he's gone to two World Skate Olympic Qualifiers, in Argentina and the United Arab Emirates.



AIR TIME: Oli Ward, a Grade 11 student and top prospect for the national team, trains at the Hastings Skate Park in Vancouver on Aug. 4, 2023.

PHOTO JENNIFER GAUTHIER

When the **NOW** asked what the best part of winning the competitions was, he said, "It feels fun to go out there and see all the people that I don't usually get to see every day."

Oli described the skating community as a place where everyone, even those from across the country, get together to enjoy the sport and compete.

"Especially when I'm skating with kids my age, I feel like we can just push each other. Because I feel like if my friend learns a trick, I feel like I have to learn it too. Keep pushing each other — I don't want to get worse than him, and he doesn't want to get worse than me."

NEXT STOP

Oli will be headed to It-

aly in October as an invited participant to the World Skate Paris Olympic Qualifier.

"All the best people in the world are there," he says, adding, "It's crazy, because I've been watching those people on TV since I was little."

It's one more stop in a busy year.

Last month, Oli petitioned city council to

build an Olympic-grade skateboard park in Burnaby — something he said is "desperately needed" in the city.

"I don't think anyone actually comes to Burnaby to skateboard, because all the parks, they're really old and rough."

Hastings Skate Park (affectionately dubbed "Mother Hastings" by local skaters), while also an older park, is better taken care of — "polished and stuff," says Oli.

For now, Oli is working on his kick flip indys and wants to learn how to 540.

He pulls out a mini fingerboard at one point to demonstrate a smith grind, where the board grinds along the ramp's edge.

"After you learn a certain amount of tricks, it's really hard to learn more because it just keeps getting harder."

But for Oli, that's also one of the best parts of skateboarding.

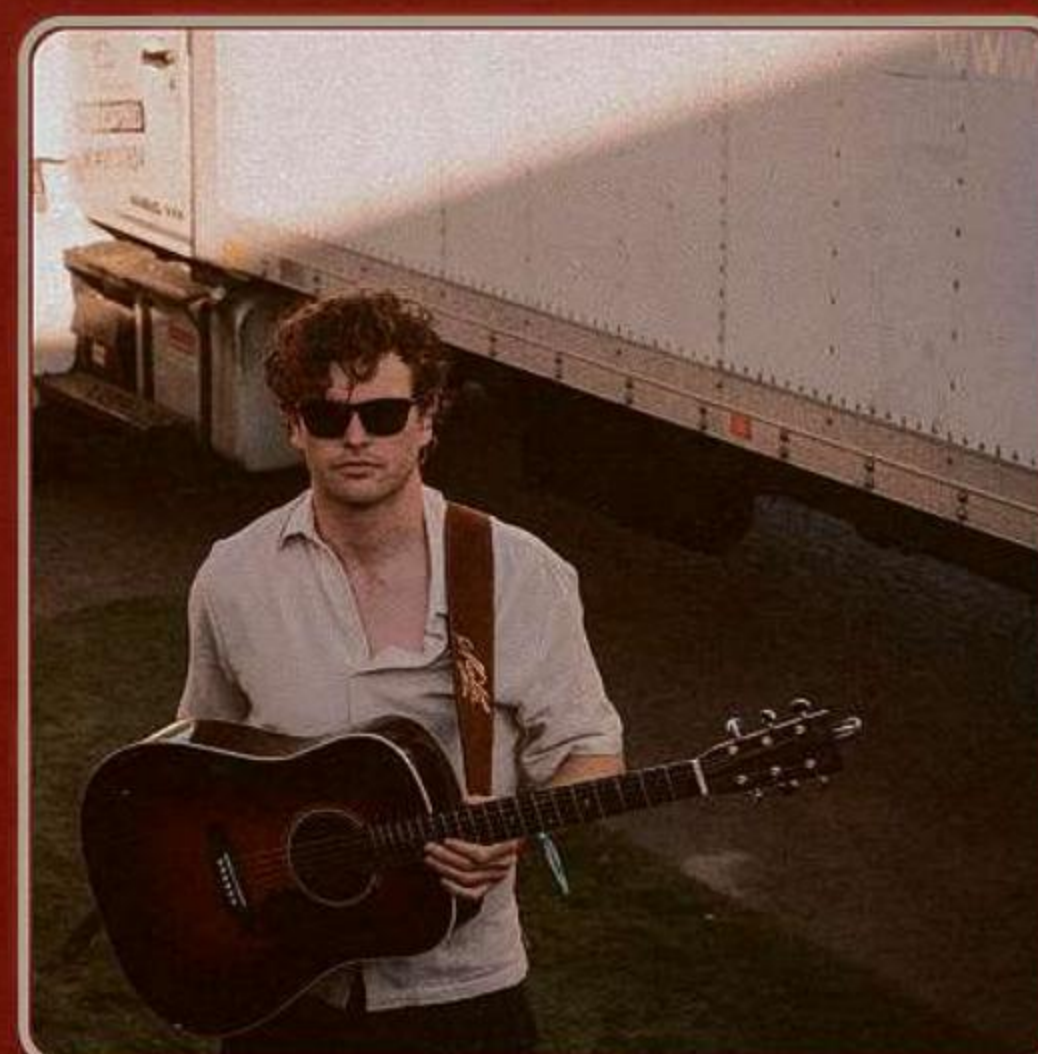
"It's all the friends you make and learning new tricks, and how there's never a point you have to stop learning stuff."

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