

Sports

THE SKATEBOARDING SUPERSTAR

BY CHELSEA LEU · PHOTOGRAPHS BY ZORAH OLIVIA



To excel at the X Games, Brighton Zeuner, 13, has mastered smith grinds, lipslides and the backside air, shown here.

EVEN WHEN SHE was 8, Brighton Zeuner had an independent streak. "I thought, I want to do a sport where there are no rules," she says. Now, at 13, she has skateboarded in Sweden, China and Australia, and she'll compete at the X Games in Minneapolis next month. This won't be her first time at the event, which is like the Olympics for extreme sports: Last July, the day after she turned 13, she became the youngest person to win gold at the Games — male or female, in any sport.

To prepare for her competitions, she works out with a trainer twice

a week, lifting weights, biking and doing jumping exercises, which are crucial for strengthening the knees and lessening the impact of nasty falls. (Inevitable when attempting, say, a kickflip.) She'll also head over to her local skate park in San Diego every day with her brother or her friends for a few hours, or by herself if she wants to focus on nailing a trick. Lately, she's been challenging herself with ollie 360s (which involve jumping, turning a full circle and landing backward) and practicing blunt slides (in which she'll slide across an edge on her board's tail).

Before a big event, she'll get a photo of the course, so she can start designing a routine that plays off its banks, bowls and other features. Then, on the big day, she'll have a chance to firm up a 45-second run that incorporates maneuvers like smith grinds (scraping the skateboard's back axle along an edge) and lipslides (gliding over an edge on the center of a skateboard). Brighton's next big goal is the Olympics themselves, which will have a skateboarding event for the very first time at the Tokyo games in 2020. By then she'll be 16 — just old enough to enter. ♦

TINY STORY

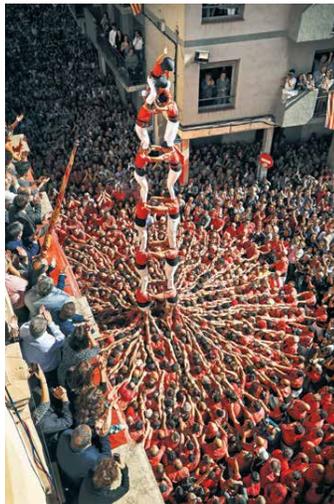
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The number of men's soccer teams going head-to-head at the World Cup in Russia over the next month. The final game will take place on July 15.



1986

The last time the United States failed to qualify for the tournament (you weren't even born yet). The team didn't make it this year either.



The *enxaneta's* job is critical: The boy or girl must raise it to the top, raise one hand and then climb down, or else the team won't get full credit for its pyramid.

AT THE TOP OF A HUMAN PYRAMID

BY LEXI PANDELL

CARLA OLIVELLA, 10, does something you've probably never heard of: castelling, the acrobatic art of building massive towers out of people. The sport is famous in Catalonia, the region of northeastern Spain where Carla lives, and June marks the beginning of castell season. This tradition began hundreds of years ago. Today there are about 15,000 castellers in roughly 100 castell groups. Castell means "castle" in Catalan, which makes sense when you see what the towers look like. To build them, dozens of strong adults start by forming a wide base. They stand close together and brace their arms against one another's bodies to give the structure a sturdy foundation. Next, other members climb onto one another's shoulders to create new levels. As the tower

grows taller, it also becomes narrower and heavier. Because she's brave and light, Carla is the *enxaneta*, the child who ascends to the very top. She wears a special helmet and a mouth guard, plus a belt that other castellers can grab if she slips. Safety is important — castells can be up to 10 people high! Carla's parents, sister and cousin are all a part of her team, the Castellers de Vilafranca. "I started climbing big human towers at 4 or 5 years old," she says. They perform at festivals throughout the summer. The only competitive event is the Concurs de Castells, which will be held in October, when teams compete for high scores by completing difficult formations. "I'm not afraid of heights," Carla says. Her favorite part, though? "When we get down, and I can celebrate." ♦

PUZZLE

WORD MAZE

BY SAM VON EHREN

Now that school's out and you can spend your day how you want (mostly), may we recommend a sport or two to play with friends or neighbors? You'll find a handful of good ones in this puzzle. Good luck!

THE RULES

- Your goal is to connect the yellow B to the yellow L by spelling out words in between.
- You may only move horizontally or vertically.
- You can only go through a letter once.
- Your path must spell out real words!

EXAMPLE:

A → N → T → B → O → Y is valid (ANT → BOY)
A → N → T → B → T → S is not valid (ANT → BTS)

B	A	S	E	B
E	B	L	L	A
E	S	S	R	T
S	I	O	E	E
W	R	C	C	N
I	F	S	I	N
M	M	I	N	G
E	L	L	O	V
Y	B	A	L	L