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ABOUT THE COVER: For our first-ever Sportz Issue, *SLUG* Photographer Ashley Christenson captured this slam-dunk shot of trading cards both old and new, including some of this issue's featured athletes on one-of-a-kind cards designed by our own Joshua Joye.

Dustin Hardebeck

Contributor Limelight Brand Ambassador, Writer



Thorough, reliable and diligent, Dustin Hardebeck has been boosting *SLUG*'s local stories with his impressive writing for almost two years, and representing *SLUG* at community events for 10 months. Read his interview with local snowboard shops *Chimera* and *Pallas* on page 18.

Leah Call

Contributor Limelight Contributing Writer



Leah Call brings her insider knowledge of Logan's arts and culture—and her impeccable writing skills—to *SLUG*. As a former Editorial Intern, you may have read her artfully crafted captions on our social media, too. Read her feature on Utah Wild Ultimate Frisbee on page 12!

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FREE THE GAME

a mission to bring the street soccer to youth.

By Grace Simpson • simpson.agrace@gmail.com

Joining a soccer team often comes with a high cost, excluding youth in lower socio-economic classes. Finding space to play soccer for free can be difficult for youth in these communities, but **Travis Winn** is working to change this.

Calle, a sports lifestyle brand founded by Winn, was originally established in 2006 but investors took it in a different direction starting in 2012. In 2019, Winn worked to revive the brand with a renewed purpose: empowering youth through street soccer.

"One of the biggest regrets from *Calle* 1.0 was [that] we never built a court where people could play when we were gone," Winn explains. "I bought the rights to the brand back [because] I felt like I wasn't done with what the mission was." This led to Free the Game, a nonprofit where 10% of all *Calle* sales go toward building free-access soccer courts in underserved communities.

Free the Game's free courts are taking the struggle away and providing equal opportunity to all youth, no matter their gender, race or economic background. Winn recognizes the paywall young players face when wanting to play soccer. Parents are put under immense stress to pay for travel expenses and club dues, and Winn feels that frustration.

"Soccer is the poor man's sport. That's why it traveled to the rest of the world," Winn explains. "You just needed a ball and some friends and [you could] make goals in between this crack and that wall. It's a very innocent and simple game that unites

Travis Winn spearheaded the construction of Free the Game's first Utah soccer court in Sherwood Park.

Photo: Kevin TK Frantz



fast-paced in a 4v4 game, whereas field soccer is 11v11 and gives players fewer opportunities to interact directly with the ball. Winn describes why street soccer is effective at teaching kids the game: "As you shrink the space you have, it pressurizes it a little bit; it's constant play," he says. "It trains the kids to be efficient and proficient. A smaller space equates to a greater level of success."

Free the Game has successfully built two courts, one in Sugar House Park and one in Sherwood Park, and the city of Salt Lake recently gave the nonprofit a major \$350,000 grant to make four additional courts in various parks. Winn has big plans for the Valley after these courts are completed. "We want to create a network of interconnected courts where communities are thriving," he says.

Winn is proud of what Free the Game has begun to build in Salt Lake. One day, while having a particularly rough week, he decided to drive past the Sugar House court: "I was like, 'If someone's playing there, it'll be worth it. It would feel good after this shitty week if someone was playing on it.'" His hopes came true that day. "It was a blessing," Winn says.

You can follow Free the Game's journey through their website freethethegame.org or on Instagram at [@free.the.game](https://www.instagram.com/free.the.game). You can also follow *Calle* at [@calleslc](https://www.instagram.com/calleslc) and support their business in downtown SLC at 625 S 600 W. 10% of all purchases are donated to Free the Game and will help to build more courts across Utah.

countries. But in America, it's become very exclusive to be at the top levels."

Free the Game emphasizes fun and personal growth over strict competition, which not only builds skilled athletes but also fosters a love for the game. Winn holds that love for soccer personally, as he has played all his life. He was first introduced to street soccer when he served an LDS mission in Spain and saw firsthand how effective it was at engaging and teaching youth.

Street soccer differs from traditional soccer in several ways. Street soccer is



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ACTIVE RECOVERY WITH ONCEPICKLED

By Mallory Meados • @mallory_michele_

A mental health and substance abuse counselor, Nick Bolton founded OncePickled after seeing how pickleball created necessary community support and joy for people in recovery.

Photo: John Barkiple



When I meet with Nick Bolton and Adam Rudy to learn about their sober pickleball group, I feel instantly welcomed by their warm, easygoing presence. I imagine this is how new members feel when they join OncePickled, a pickleball group for people in recovery from substance use and mental health disorders.

Bolton founded OncePickled over a year ago after gathering people together from an inpatient recovery center to play pick-up games of pickleball. With little experience himself, Bolton and the group had a fun time learning how to play, challenging and cheering on one another. As a mental health and substance abuse counselor, Bolton realized the potential this sport could have, not just for individuals in inpatient rehab programs but also for people living in the community. "At the time, I was working with a client in recovery who had social anxiety. He would attend group AA meetings, but it felt difficult for him to connect. When I saw how he opened up and bonded with people while playing [pickleball], I knew there was potential," says Bolton.

"No one becomes sober just to be miserable," says Rudy, a local barber and member of OncePickled. Rudy shares that when he was struggling most with addiction, he became quite isolated. "While there are plenty of 12-step recovery programs, it doesn't always fulfill the need for community people are searching for. Things like OncePickled bring people together in a fun and active way. It's what people, including myself, have missed in their recovery programs," says Rudy. He also emphasized that physical activity has greatly improved his mental health, aiding his recovery and making OncePickled events something he looks forward to.

"We now host two events a month but are hoping to increase this for the winter since many people are looking for things to do [as] other leagues, like softball, end for the season," says Bolton. The group aims to

make the events, and the sport in general, low-barrier by keeping events free and open to anyone in any stage of their recovery, with no pickleball experience required. The tournaments include people in the community and individuals in recovery programs, which can offer a sense of connection for those transitioning out of inpatient programs. "Plugging people into these events while still in treatment sets them up to succeed. It's a good way to keep people together," says Rudy.

"It's the people in early recovery who we want to feel supported," says Bolton. After leaving an inpatient treatment program, people in early recovery face challenges returning to old environments and habits in a community not designed to support sobriety. OncePickled provides people in recovery with a meaningful alternative, filling their lives with fun and connection. "After people graduate from their inpatient programs, they usually don't have disposable incomes for memberships or gyms," says Bolton. "We don't want there to be any reason why someone wouldn't want to come to our events. We have paddles and supplies."

The events are organized in a King's Court tournament style, often at the Midvale and Sandy courts, with players eventually matching up with people of similar skill sets. Thanks to several sponsors, including local recovery programs like Wasatch Recovery Treatment Center, Ascend Recovery and Balance House, Bolton is able to organize the events and include fun prizes for tournament winners. "People can win their own paddles, and now they can play outside our events. Another prize is a haircut with Rudy," says Bolton.

"The opposite of addiction is community," says Rudy. OncePickled offers a community for people in recovery who are experiencing the same challenges and triumphs. "This is a safe haven for the sober community, and Bolton has invested so much to make this a group people can rely on and look forward to," says Rudy.

Check out upcoming OncePickled events at oncepickled.org, on their Instagram page @oncepickled or on The Phoenix App, an online platform that publicizes sober events nationwide for individuals in recovery.

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ADAPTIVE SNOWBOARDER IZY HICKS CARVES HER OWN PATH

BY Sara Milano • saramilano98@gmail.com

At just 22 years old, Izy Hicks is breaking barriers in adaptive sports as a competitive snowboarder. A congenital amputee competing in the Upper Limb I category, Hicks has made a name for herself in an environment where disabled women are often underrepresented, challenging misconceptions and inspiring people of all abilities to embrace their athletic potential.

Hicks began snowboarding at 10 years old and soon after became involved with the *National Ability Center (NAC)*, a nonprofit based in Park City that promotes recreation for people with disabilities. She started racing competitively at age 13 in the boardercross event, where multiple riders race head-to-head down a course with turns, jumps and obstacles. Since then, Hicks has traveled to Canada, Italy, Germany and South Korea for adaptive snowboarding competitions and events. Despite her successes, the journey has not been without its challenges.

One of Hicks' most significant career moments came during her first international competition in Cortina, Italy where she suffered a bad fall and broke four ribs. Unaware of the extent of her injuries, she continued to race for two more days before finally getting an X-ray a week later. This kind of resilience is characteristic of Hicks and many disabled athletes in the sport.

Hicks describes the adaptive snowsports community as particularly close-knit and encouraging. "It's about fostering a supportive environment that I think you don't get in a lot of other sports," she says. During one competition, Hicks had a nasty collision with another competitor, Polish adaptive

snowboarder **Anna Drobna**. The two women developed a friendship afterward. "We were still thrilled to see each other later in competition. When people ask us who we want to win, we say each other," says Hicks. The small field of competition has meant a close community for athletes, but it has also presented challenges for Hicks and other competitors.

"The adaptive environment, for snowboarding specifically, I've found to be really forthcoming in their support. They want people to show up, especially because [adaptive sports] are in peril of losing participation," Hicks says. Women in particular are underrepresented in adaptive sports. "I think there are barriers in getting women involved, even about the attitudes surrounding women in sports," she says. "I think a lot of times people don't believe that's even an option for them. It kind of turns a lot of women away automatically."

Low participation on the women's side has already put several adaptive snowboarding events in jeopardy, with one of the women's categories being stripped from the Paralympic Games. Hicks' category, Upper Limb I, has never been in the Paralympic



Izy Hicks picked up snowboarding at the age of 10 and has since traveled the world competing and representing the importance of space for women in adaptive sports.

pic Games at all. On the men's side, the same category has the largest field of competition in Paralympic snowboarding. Hicks hopes to close the gaps in adaptive snowboarding, with one of her biggest goals being to grow the sport for women like her—sharing aspirations of starting a camp for disabled women to learn the fundamentals of freestyle riding. Hicks also hopes to join the national team one day, but her Paralympic aspirations are on hold until her category is introduced in the games.

Despite the increased visibility of events like the Paralympics, many athletes still face misconceptions surrounding adaptive sports. "People with disabilities in adaptive sports do face a sort of infantilization. There is a struggle to find people who validate adaptive sports as equal or unilaterally competitive with other able-bodied sports," Hicks says. Community support is crucial for adaptive sports, where local viewership and engagement can help nonprofits like the *NAC* thrive, increasing participation for future generations. Adaptive sports deserve the same levels of "social participation and celebration" as able-bodied sports, Hicks says, "because they really are just as hard, or harder, and just as fun, if not more fun, to watch."

For interested viewers, follow along with Hicks' season as she competes in boardercross and banked slalom events. Don't miss the Huntsman Cup, an adaptive ski race and stepping stone to the Paralympics, hosted by the *NAC* in February to help build community support for adaptive sports.

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CATCH THEIR SPIRIT:

Utah Wild Fosters Equity in Ultimate Frisbee

By Leah Call • leahcall267@gmail.com || Photos courtesy of Utah Wild

Utah Wild brings visibility to women and nonbinary athletes, making no qualms about their power on the ultimate frisbee field. They champion the idea that anybody and every kind of body can find a community to learn skills of collaboration, empathy, grit and teamwork. They can push themselves, push their bodies and push their minds.

Ultimate frisbee, or ultimate, has been around since the '50s. It was popularized at the college and recreational levels, with the first professional men's league forming in 2012. In 2018, calls for equity in women's professional ultimate prompted interest in starting a team in Utah, especially as the local women's club team was gaining regional and national success in late 2019. Although the pandemic delayed its launch, it provided valuable time to organize and prepare for the first season, which began in spring 2022.

Erica Bindas is the president of the board of directors for Utah Wild. "Our mission is really to advance the visibility, equity and high quality competition for women and non binary players through the sport of ultimate [frisbee]," says Bindas. The organization was founded by six women and nonbinary people who all play sports and understand the importance of getting involved.

Ultimate frisbee is unique in that it's a self-reporting sport. Players are responsible for calling their own fouls. "If someone calls a foul on you, you are responsible

for discussing that with them [and] talking it out," Bindas says. "Think about, you know, what were my actions? Was I making a safe play? Was I putting my opponent in danger by making that play? There's a responsibility in the nature of ultimate that I think is really cool and teaches a lot of valuable skills."

After finishing last in the team's inaugural season, Utah Wild took second place this past season. Off the field, Utah Wild has partnered with like-minded organizations to promote the sport, attracting a broader fan base and fostering excitement for its future, especially as they look ahead to 2025. They aim to engage communities that aren't heavily involved in ultimate, particularly focusing on young girls and queer individuals, to showcase the sport and provide role models who encourage continued participation in athletics. By partnering with organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters and Stonewall Sports, they host summer camps and clinics that emphasize fun while teaching the basics of ultimate.

"Success looks like a lot of different things. The baseline level of its success, which is certainly not flashy, is just existing," says Bindas. "We want to make sure that we continue to exist, so that players who are in high school right now have an opportunity to play in the future. Even if it is only a few hundred people coming to games for the first 10 years, the fact that we exist for 10 years is something I'm very proud of."

She explained that Utah Wild is a nonprofit run by volunteer and underpaid labor. "It's no small task to get a lot of dedicated people together to make something happen. Every year that we continue to operate is a success for both the visibility of ultimate and the visibility of women and nonbinary athletes as well," she says.

Utah Wild is out and proud about their support of women and nonbinary people and are conscious of the fact they operate in a state that puts bans on trans people playing sports, dictates where they can change their clothes and restricts life-saving health care. "It's really tough to coexist with that sometimes," says Bindas. "We proudly display LGBTQ flags at our games, and I'm sure there [are] people who see that and walk away. That sucks, but at the end of the day, we've always been of the belief that we can't and shouldn't be shy about our support for these communities, because they deserve loud and proud support in all aspects."

Visit their website at utahwildultimate.org/blog.



Utah Wild welcomes both women and nonbinary athletes as a way to push the body and soul through ultimate frisbee.

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outhwest of Salt Lake City, at the mouth of Bingham Canyon and the base of the Oquirrh Mountains, **Nicole Davis** runs a private gym called BodyStrong SLC. She offers strength training classes and practice groups for the Highland Games, a traditional Scottish competition consisting of nine unique events.

Davis started weightlifting later in life, previously believing that working out was about being a certain size. After an injury, however, she began lifting weights as a way to focus on "performance rather than the scale," she says.

She was initially drawn to compete in the Highland Games because it required strength, athleticism and skill. Although she had prior experience with weight training, she liked the added challenge of a new and unique sport. She has been competing ever since and now trains her own clients and has a slew of state records as well as a couple of world records.

In the Highland Games events, heavyweight and lightweight objects are thrown and measured over either distance or height. These objects may be heavy stones, weights attached to chains, hammers or a long, tapered pine pole weighing over 50 pounds. Competitors split into certain classes based on age, gender, weight or experience. In each of these events, competitors compete in kilts, some connecting with their Scottish roots. In some events, like the hammer throw, competitors use specific equipment, such as special boots outfitted with customized large metal blades to dig into the ground and stabilize the thrower's momentum.

For Davis though, the Highland Games is more than a competition: It's community. Highland Games competitions often run alongside Scottish festivals, where there is also a representation of Scottish clans, music and food. She says that even when she travels to out-of-state Highland Games, there's a bond between the

BUILDING STRENGTH & CONFIDENCE AT THE



By **Rosie Mansfield**
romansfield@gmail.com



Nicole Davis has set state and even world records in the Highland Games and trains athletes aspiring to compete.

athletes because there's an underground and unique nature to the competition. Although the events are entertaining to watch, Davis reiterates that it takes training and skill to be able to consistently perform in the nine events.

Her favorite event is the sheaf toss, where a competitor must use a pitchfork-like tool to throw an approximately 10-pound burlap bag a certain height. "My first and second season, it was my worst event," she says. Davis most enjoys the progress and effort it took to not only improve, but to excel in the event. This July, she set the world record in her competition class, throwing the bag 29 feet and one inch in her home state of Utah.

In her personal training work, Davis sees a similar transformation in her clients. Some of the women who come to her gym are initially focused on achieving a number on the scale or showing up for the social aspect of the workouts. However, like Davis, they begin to realize that performance and strength are far more empowering. "It's rewarding to see how strength can impact every part of their life," Davis says. "It's about being able to stand up taller both in and outside of the gym."

The gym's walls are adorned with swords, a coat of arms and trophies from past competitions. Davis says she sees women closing the gap in participation and elevated levels of competition at the Highland Games. She is proud to see women taking up space. At the competitions, she says, "It's not about your size. It's about how strong you can be, how skilled you can be."

Davis recommends joining a group practice, if you think you might be interested. To learn more about Nicole Davis and her gym, check out bodystrongslc.com or [@bodystrongslc](https://www.instagram.com/bodystrongslc) on Instagram. Find the Utah Highland Games community online at utahheavyathletics.com.

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COMMUNITY THROUGH KICKS:

★ ALEXIS WHITNEY'S SLC MUAY THAI ★

By Peter Eckhardt • eckhardtwrites@gmail.com

Step into *SLC Muay Thai* and feel the passion that built the place. Posters advertising local fights hang above T-shirts screen printed in a coach's garage. *SLC Muay Thai* founder Alexis Whitney gestures at some salt-forward electrolytes: "I'm big on making sure people are hydrated and fed."

In the converted gym (a former garage), eight-foot-tall and heavy bags sprout from the ground while others twist on chains. We stop to admire the boxing ring. "Not every gym has one," Whitney says. "It's really important to me to help competitors get used to the space."

A brown-haired woman in her early 30s, Whitney stands tall amidst the bags. A series of kicks sends one spinning. "When I first started, I didn't really move my feet or head. I would just stand in the pocket and throw," Whitney says. "But after a

while I learned, 'Oh, I can move.' Now, I'm more evasive and tricky."

Whitney got hooked on Muay Thai when some friends took her to the now-closed *Muay Thai Institute*. Muay Thai dates back to seventh century Thailand and was used by warriors who had lost their weapons. Today, the sport is most popular in MMA. Something sparked in Whitney while watching her first match. "When I was younger, I always wanted to do extreme sports. Having a single mom who's divorced twice, I didn't have much opportunity for extracurricular activities. When Muay Thai came up in my early 20s, it was really, really exciting," she says.

Whitney quickly took to the sport. Classes gave her structure, pulling her away from partying and connected her with the local martial arts community. Soon, her teacher asked her to help run the gym and Whitney became a partner.

Things were good when all of the sudden, Whitney's teacher "The Punisher" split town in 2021, leaving the gym solely in Whitney's hands. "All of a sudden, we had this whole gym and no head trainer. It was really scary, but this community meant a lot to me. I needed to keep the doors open."

There is no manual for running a gym, and Whitney needed trial and error to figure out how to run the newly-minted *SLC Muay Thai*. "I was used to things being a certain way, and it was challenging mentally and physically. There were times I was depressed or anxious, but having to show up for this community



forced me to get out of bed. I'm grateful for that. I learned it's okay to do things differently," Whitney explains.

Now, Whitney hopes to share Muay Thai as much as possible. "Since gaining ownership, I got my personal training certificate. I became a certified women's coach and a nutrition coach, just so I could be more supportive," she says. "When I started training, I saw a lack of support. A lot of my coaches look and say, 'Man, where was this support when I was fighting?'"

Whitney also hosts the Utah Women's Muay Thai Club. At 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Friday of every month, the club provides a space for women of all skill levels to practice. "It's been really empowering for us and for the community to offer that space," she recounts. "Muay Thai saves lives."

Running her gym and the Women's Muay Thai Club have given Whitney an inclusive perspective: "If you're nervous about going in, just check out the space. Once you stick your head in, you realize, 'Oh my gosh, this isn't just full of people beating the crap out of each other—they're having fun!' I see a change in people. They walk a little taller. They speak a little more confidently."

SLC Muay Thai offers two free weeks of classes for folks interested in trying it and is launching a "Pay It Forward" campaign in 2025 that sponsors memberships for individuals not otherwise able to pay. Find the gym at 3361 S 200 E in South Salt Lake, or on Instagram at @slcmuaythai and @utahwomensmuaythaiclub. Businesses wanting to sponsor a "Pay It Forward" membership can email info@slcmuaythai.com.



Alexis Whitney always wanted to do extreme sports, but she didn't get hooked on Muay Thai until her early 20s.



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AT CHIMERA AND PALLAS SNOWBOARDS

By Dustin Hardebeck • dhardebeck98@gmail.com

Kate Colgan, Sid Garrido and Alister Horn, the masterminds behind *Chimera Snowboards* and *Pallas Snowboards*, provide compelling insights about the practice of backcountry snowboarding, as well as their niche of creating and riding unique “split-boards.”

All three were frequent snowboarders prior to starting *Chimera* and *Pallas*. While *Chimera* was founded in 2009 upon this idea of making split-boards for the general public and increasing accessibility into the outdoors, *Pallas* began as a sister company in 2013 when Garrido, Colgan and Horn decided to manufacture snowboards specifically for women—something the community at large had not addressed back then.

“Split-boarding is the process of splitting one board into two skis. You use the skis to go uphill and reassemble the skis to snowboard [downhill],” says Horn. “In 2009, not many people made them and they were not very good. Since then, *Pallas* has started building split-boards for women.” While they are two separate manufacturing units, they remain sister companies and continue to collaborate, workshop designs and manufacture ideas together.

“Snowboarding and split-boarding could be summed up as two different brands under the same umbrella, where *Chimera* is focused on the split-boarding and designing, and *Pallas* focuses on split-board and snowboard design from a woman’s perspective,” says Garrido. “Within [our] snowboard design, there [are] so many different options for different designs. There’s a snowboard that’s specific to deep powder days, or a snowboard that’s really good in a park where people will ride rails and jumps.”

Chimera and *Pallas* are also flavored by Salt Lake City’s arts culture. The majority of the snowboard and split-board designs come from **Willy Nevins**, a local skateboarder and SLC-based artist. Nevins manages the media outlets for both companies and produces graphics and animations that go into the designs of each board.

In its early years, *Chimera* built volume-shift boards, which have a distinct nose and tail and a greater surface area, for women. One of the lines of snowboards uses a plastic, inside-edge that requires half the steel that a regular snowboard uses and optimizes different ski boot sizes. “One thing I love about our boards is that they are as aesthetically pleasing as they are fun to ride. The shapes of our boards are so eye-catching,” says Horn. “*Pallas* is one of the first women’s brands in the game to build directional, volume-shifted boards.”

Colgan explains that “creating a space for women in backcountry snowboarding where they feel safe and included, if they’re

new and want to learn; giving them a community and support system” are all important. “When I started snowboarding in 2007, my board rode so bad I didn’t want to do it. I swore off women’s boards until I found *Pallas*,” she says.

Pallas offers clinics every December that provide lessons addressing safe travel techniques, as well as instruction on using proper rescue equipment and navigating the background environment properly with weather and avalanche forecast technology. “On the education side, you have the gear, you have your split-board. And then you have your avalanche rescue gear, and that’s what you use in the event of an avalanche,” says Colgan. “You need to know how to use that gear and how to travel safely. Anyone who wants to venture out into the backcountry should be taking classes to learn.”

One local program that snowboarders can attend is “Know Before You Go,” where riders can learn more about the essential elements of backcountry travel and riding in order to make more educated decisions. “It’s good to have a foundation of snowboarding basics before you do split-boarding to ensure you are safe out there,” says Garrido.

In addition to offering split-boards and backcountry clinics to Utah residents, *Chimera* and *Pallas* both offer these initiatives worldwide, giving millions of aspiring snowboarders the chance to become better equipped for backcountry adventures. Learn more online at chimerasnowboards.com and pallasnowboards.com.

Photo: John Taylor

(From L-R) Alister Horn, Sid Garrido and Kate Colgan work behind-the-scenes at *Chimera Snowboards* and *Pallas Snowboards* to create unique, inclusive and high-quality boards for everyone.



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A corner kick by Real Salt Lake midfielder Diego Luna, captured by Joe Oliver



Joe Oliver at Utah State University's Maverik Stadium for an Aggies football game

ALLEY-OOPS and HAIL MARYS

how **joe oliver** captures sports' biggest moments

By wphughes • william@slugmag.com

We all know the photo of Muhammad Ali's 1965 victory over Sonny Liston, where the former heavyweight champion stands over his opponent as he lays flat on his back; or the shot of Michael Jordan at the 1988 Slam Dunk Contest taking off from the free throw line, his tongue sticking straight out. While we may instantly recognize these images, we hardly know the people behind the camera. The former was shot by *Sports Illustrated's* own Neil Leifer and the latter by legend of the genre Walter Iooss Jr. Just like those two titans, Utah sports photographer Joe Oliver sets out to capture incredible moments in the realm of sports

After years of working in many different fields, Oliver found himself wanting a change. In need of a new hobby, he looked to one he held dear as a child. "I thought, well, I liked photography when I was a kid, let's try it again," Oliver says. He recalls getting his first camera at age 10—a Kodak 110 with a burnout light bulb flash. Years later, Oliver found photography to be a good outlet, one that saw him improve rapidly and gain close connections in the professional field. Oliver eventually transitioned into photography as a full-time job, photographing regularly for local college basketball teams and even the National Football League.

Pursuing sports photography means constantly looking for new opportunities to shoot for teams, events or players. There are a lucky few who get signed to professional teams, but the majority of sports photographers have to hunt down jobs week to week. "I'll look two, three, four weeks out and I'll be emailing people so that I have things lined up for me every week," he says. Based on his previous work, Oliver was signed to Gonzaga University's media team for their basketball game against the University of Utah.

Oliver has an edge for his ability to review, edit and upload photos during the short breaks in the game, a task that often takes dozens of people on a signed media team to accomplish. "It's a big thing that I do for teams and for players—during the game, I'll edit photos," he says. "I miss part of the game, but I get what I need." There are many elements that Oliver has to manage to get the perfect shot, from suboptimal arena lighting to players' positions on the field or court. While basketball is relatively predictable—photographers are often set up at one end of the court with a guarantee that half the game will be played under their hoop—sports like soccer are hard because the photographers are often stuck in one place, waiting for the action to come to them.

Though it can be difficult, Oliver says his favorite part of sports photography is just being present in the stadium and capturing the event as it unfolds. One of his favorite experiences was shooting the USA Men's Olympic Basketball Team Showcase in Las Vegas when they played against Canada. "I thought, 'How can I shoot the Olympics?' I mean, because I did an NFL game. That's the highest rated [sports event] below the World Cup and the Olympics," he says. Oliver quickly discovered, though, that going to Paris was going to be too costly. After receiving denials from many national teams, he kept following up, which eventually led to his approval for the Team USA showcase.

The connections that Oliver makes with athletes performing their best means more to him than any other kind of recognition. "The reason I love [sports photography] and why I keep doing it is the reaction that I get from the athletes," he says. "Sending them [photos] and they're like, 'Oh, this is really good,' and not only sharing it, but crediting you. Having athletes reach out to you after games and saying, 'Hey, can I hire you to come do this?'" If you are an athlete in need of incredible shots, find Oliver on Instagram at @iamjoeoliver or @joeoliversports.

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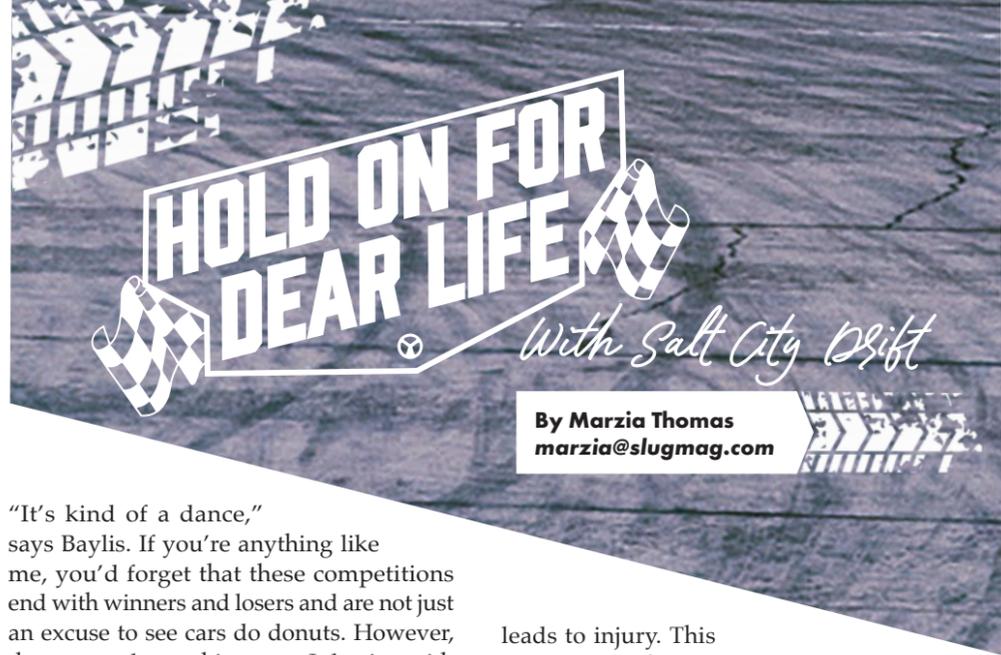
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Losing traction isn't always a bad thing: just ask the folks over at Salt City Drift. For the last 15 years, the organization has been providing events for the car guys and thrill-seekers of the Salt Lake Valley. The sport of competitive drifting has grown in popularity over time, but is largely inaccessible to those who want to participate due to the inherently dangerous nature of the sport. More often than not, street races are shut down and competitors are charged with reckless driving. There remains a necessity for locals to be able to take their Nissan 350Zs and BMW 3 Series somewhere and slide them to their heart's content. The place is *Utah Motorsports Campus*, where competitors, spectators and anyone with a need for speed is welcome.

Ryan Baylis has been Salt City Drift's director of operations and safety coordination for the last two years and Jessica West has been the director of media coverage and scheduling for the last year. We sat down with the pair to learn more about the world of organized motorsport drifting. Baylis first became interested in the sport after attending Formula Drift in 2014 and was inspired by how the drivers were able to dance with death: "I thought, 'I could do that,'" he says. West wasn't initially involved with the car community until she met her partner. She began attending competitions alongside him and would take pictures, as she was passionate about photography. The group's need for marketing combined with her talent led to West's high level of involvement in Salt City Drift, eventually running their social media. The two give me an eye into what the competitive sport consists of, from scoring and safety precautions to selfie sticks.

Photo: Jess Gruneisen



By Marzia Thomas
marzia@slugmag.com

"It's kind of a dance," says Baylis. If you're anything like me, you'd forget that these competitions end with winners and losers and are not just an excuse to see cars do donuts. However, there are rules to this game: It begins with two vehicles on the track—a lead car and a chase car. On the track, there are designated areas that the cars are required to be in for a specific amount of time. These painted zones are what decides the designated route that the drivers must follow. While driving 'round the track, the cars are drifting the whole time, indefinitely. That's right. The rounds are untimed, which means the main criteria that competitors are judged on is speed and fluidity, drift angle, line selection and style—in other words, the proximity between the door of the car and the tires. Each round, the drivers are awarded points based on how well they are able to drift—and no, the amount of smoke emitted is not counted. After each round the lead and chase switch positions and they are graded again. Whoever is able to gain the majority sum of points is deemed the victor.

A large motivation behind organizing a sport that often results in accidents is that the group is able to look out for one another. If all goes well, the event rarely

leads to injury. This is because both on a larger level of organization and in grass-roots competition, there are tech requirements that the cars are obligated to pass before they can hit the track. The cars can't have a cracked windshield and they must be a roll cage, meaning that they contain bash bars in the case of a crash, so that the driver won't be slammed into the pavement. These rules are updated every year and vary depending on the given competition. In huge news for selfie-takers, Salt City Drift does allow selfie sticks. In fact, the reasoning behind it is because drivers and passenger riders are more likely to keep their hands inside the vehicle if they are permitted to bring something that can help them take a photo. I'd certainly snap a few in the Joker mobile.

It's heartwarming to see diehard fans of an extreme sport come together for a shared purpose of keeping each other safe while participating in a high risk activity. "The community is unmatched," says West. For those interested in competing or simply spectating (and maybe even copping a ride-along), visit saltcitydrift.shop or follow them on Instagram at [@saltcitydrift](https://www.instagram.com/saltcitydrift).



Laser Trans-Siberian Orchestra

A Holiday Music Journey

Clark Planetarium's new laser show features the music of the Trans-Siberian Orchestra, blending stunning visuals with their symphonic rock sound. Set in the immersive dome, it captivates audiences with intricate laser designs and powerful compositions, showcasing the orchestra's depth and holiday spirit, making it perfect for music lovers and families.

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SKATE

From sunup to sunset, Kai Taylor is one of most talented people I've ever seen on a skateboard. It doesn't matter what spot you take him to—his mind always thinks of creative ways to skate there. Taylor is always determined to get tricks to film for different video parts. Skaters have to factor in all the risks of the trick along with the environment that they're skating in, and he managed this hectic spot with ease.

By Kevin TK Frantz • @kevinfrantzphoto



Kai Taylor - Frontside boardslide - Millcreek Common

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SLUG LOCALIZED

STAND-UP COMEDY SHOWCASE

By Sam D'Antuono • sam.dantuono@gmail.com || Photos by India Mendoza

I recently met up with local comedians **Quinn Johnson**, **Andrea Morton**, **Clint Holt** and **Kendra Green** at *Salt Lake Coffee Break* for a group interview, in preparation for their sets at *SLUG's Comedy Localized* show on December 19 at *Urban Lounge*. The conversation started about wrestling, which I loved, and moved through talking about **Jerry Seinfeld** changing his comments on leftist comedy, the time Morton flooded an entire YMCA and Green's chance to be in the same room as **Jim Caviezel**.



After surviving surgery on a brain tumor, Kendra Green's first gig at BYU Idaho sparked her passion for stand-up.

Kendra Green is one of the most proper people I've met in my life. She's always put together and wearing fashionable fits. Green is an avid baseball fan, an interest inherited from her mother, who worships the L.A. Dodgers. Another interesting tidbit about Green is that she was involved (in no small way) in the marketing for the movie *The Sound of Freedom*. Green survived brain surgery and some, including this writer, are happy she did so that she could be an indispensable part of this year's *Comedy Localized*. Green loves telling stories. She first realized she wanted to do stand-up after recovering from brain tumor surgery and watching **Iliza Shlesinger's** special *Elder Millennial*. After that, in the summer of 2018, she went to a group that was performing stand-up on the BYU Idaho campus and fell in love with it. Her dream gig is to host the Oscars one day.

When I ask if she has anything to plug, she responds with, "Single and looking for a nice boyfriend. Just kidding, please don't put that in a magazine—that is embarrassing. But also, if a guy sees my photo and is like, 'She's hot, I want to go out with her,' I wouldn't mind."



Kentucky-born Clint Holt's observational comedy draws upon his Southern upbringing.

Clint Holt is from Fairdealing, Kentucky, the best-named unincorporated community I have ever heard of. He says he decided to do stand-up when "a random guy told me a joke I could use in my little skits." In his stand-up, Holt talks about growing up Southern, his observations on being white trash and the benefits of having a local meth head. Holt started doing stand-up six years ago at a brewery in Paducah, Kentucky because a girlfriend pressured him into doing it.

Holt is a charming man that I've been lucky to spend a lot of time with over the past summer. He has played an integral role in nurturing my love of wrestling and never fails to have interesting theories on where storylines might go, whether that be in wrestling or the fantasy novel genre. He is also an avid country music fan and if you ask, he may or may not know how to steal audiobooks. Holt can be found regularly performing at *Wiseguys Comedy Club* and you can find his show dates and more on his Instagram page [@itsclintholt](https://www.instagram.com/itsclintholt).



Quinn Johnson's divorce-induced suffering helped him recognize his talent as a stand-up comedian.

Quinn Johnson started doing stand-up in "the year of our Lord, 2019," and it's been all uphill from there. Johnson loves to rave and drink White Claws, and he's still championing the long-since forgotten Juul pods we all started vaping with and frankly, forgot were still around. Johnson has seen hard times. When I ask why he started doing stand-up, he says, "I was going through a divorce and I realized that my life couldn't get worse. It got worse." From his divorce to running out of molly at his last rave, Johnson knows what it's like to suffer.

Johnson is the most adept with crowd work among all the comedians that I've seen locally. He never seems to slow down and is always jostling about on stage, moving to the next joke. Many of the sets I've seen Johnson do involve him directly provoking the crowd and dissolving the barrier between audience and performer. He's silly, lovable, quick on his feet and draws a lot of inspiration from the late, great **Brody Stevens**. He hosts a podcast called *Let's Get Fired* with local comedian **Drew Simon**. "You'll like it if you're about to bake some pumpkin bread and watch *The Sopranos* in Spanish," Johnson says. You can also check out the two open mics he hosts: Monday nights at 7:30 p.m. at *The Alliance Theatre* in Trolley Square and Wednesday nights at 10:00 p.m. at *Boomerang's* on Main Street. Look for upcoming show announcements on his Instagram page [@quinnjohnswagswerve](https://www.instagram.com/quinnjohnswagswerve).

Andrea Morton is transgender and she "needs you to know that." Much of her stand-up is about her trans identity. Oh yeah, and the fact that she once hiked from Mexico to Canada, a fun fact that she cannot seem to shut the fuck up about!

Whenever I've spent time with Morton, I always feel exhausted from laughing and having fun. She has been doing stand-up for 10 years now and is also a keen improviser. She started at an open mic at *Barley Street Tavern* in Omaha, Nebraska. "I did [the open mic], and I'm sure it went okay enough for me to keep it up," she says. "Here I am, 10 years later, still doing open mics."

Much of Morton's stand-up is autobiographical. She talks about her experiences living as a trans woman and working in the recovery community. When I ask why she loves stand-up, Morton replies, "Some people I talked to about it said that as a trans person, I could do some good normalizing trans people as a comedian. If I could let some people know it's okay to be yourself, I'd be stoked, as long as people laugh too." You can find her on Instagram and TikTok at [@thatandraperson](https://www.instagram.com/thatandraperson).



Andrea Morton's experience as a transgender woman guides her hilarious stand-up comedy, which she has been performing for a decade.

Catch stand-up sets from Quinn Johnson, Andrea Morton, Clint Holt and Kendra Green at *SLUG's Comedy Localized* on Thursday, December 19 at *Urban Lounge*. Doors are at 7:00 p.m. and the first set begins at 8:00 p.m. Get your tickets for \$5!

ROCTACO

'Til You Drop

By **Joni Bianca**
jbiancawrites@gmail.com

Photos by **Nicole Marriner**

Tucked away in one of the alleys of Salt Lake's hip and artsy downtown hub stands the artistic and eclectic **ROCTACO**. From the moment you arrive, the restaurant's creative spirit is clear, showcasing art made from repurposed materials and flaunting graffiti, stickers and murals across every surface while boasting a unique menu full of experimental taco delights.

ROCTACO's menu is broken down by meat choice, with options such as **BIRD, HOG, COW** and **SEA AND EARTH**. Since it was my first time visiting, I wanted to try a variety of their meat options, so I ordered the **HOLY**

KALBI, AMY HATES FISH and **LEBANESE BLONDE**. I also picked up a side of elote and a churro for dessert. My date, a **ROCTACO** frequent flyer, ordered pork quesadillas and a couple of the **BANH MIJO** tacos (\$4.90) to try out, finishing up with a bottled lime Jarritos to complement the meal.

I started with the Korean-inspired taco, the **HOLY KALBI** (\$4.90), which comprises Korean bulgogi, purple cabbage, green onion and pickled jalapeno with a "srirajang" sauce—likely a combination of gochujang and sriracha. As an overall combination, these ingredients work well together, but I found the bulgogi to be lacking in flavor. It was appropriately sweet but missing the balance of the savory flavors usually found in bulgogi. I also expected a bit more of the sauce, which tasted like a sriracha mayo but with underwhelming spice. The highlight of the dish for me was the crunch of the cabbage. The taco was decent overall, but left me longing for more flavor.

Next up on the menu was **AMY HATES FISH** (\$4.90), a taco made with fried fish, chipotle lime sauce, purple cabbage and salsa on a corn tortilla. This taco was an absolute delight to eat. The sauce and salsa were the perfect combination of sour and spicy, which complemented the clear and bright flavor of the perfectly fried and fresh-tasting fish. This taco is bursting with flavor and was my absolute favorite of the night.

The **LEBANESE BLONDE** (\$4.90) is a vegetarian taco that uses juustoleipä cheese as the primary protein. To bring it all together, it also has a citrus tabbouleh, pickled red onions and a creamy cilantro sauce. This was the most unique taco that I tried. The overall combination of flavors was good, and the tabbouleh was especially tasty. The grilled juustoleipä, however, has a richness that isn't quite cut by the delightful pickled onions



L-R: **HOLY KALBI, AMY HATES FISH, BANH MIJO** and **LEBANESE BLONDE**.

and has a distracting texture in the taco—it's quite thick and squishy. It doesn't feel nor taste like cheese and it certainly doesn't replace meat in a palatable way. Perhaps another form of protein or a delicious vegetable could make this veggie taco a winner.

As for the menu items that are not tacos, the elotes (\$4) tasted like garlic bread and could have used some more spice. The churro I snagged for dessert (\$3.49) was extremely flavorful and fried to a perfect crunch. My date praised the **BANH MIJO**, saying it was the best dish he had from the restaurant. **ROCTACO's** menu is just as creative and unique as their decor, proving their concept runs throughout every aspect of the business.

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 Brent Forever: Jeremy Zucker + Chelsea Cutler ^{LOW TICKETS} - 12.07 The Complex
 Houndmouth - 1.04 The Depot | **Tophouse** - 1.19 Soundwell | **Glaive** ^{LOW TICKETS} - 1.21 Soundwell
 Jamie Miller - 1.26 The Complex | **Lauren Mayberry** (of CHVRCHES) - 1.31 Soundwell
 Travis - 2.04 The Depot | **Wallace** - 2.14 Soundwell | **Hazlett** ^{SOLD OUT} - 2.15 The Depot
 Phantogram - 2.19 The Union | **Good Kid** - 2.22 The Complex | **MISSIO** - 2.22 Soundwell
 Mount Eerie - 2.23 Soundwell | **MJ Lenderman** ^{SOLD OUT} - 2.24 Soundwell | **This Wild Life** - 2.28 Soundwell

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Gavn! ^{SOLD OUT} 12.3
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 Coat Drive! Hurtado + Sunhills + DRAG 12.6
 Greet Death 12.7
 Lounge Monkey + The Burnout Society + Sunnies 12.9
 Door City + Good Ol Days + Love Audrey 12.10
 Spencer Sanders + Sasha Haydn 12.11
 Anyone Awake + Coastal City + Curvball 12.12
 Lil Peep Memorial Show ^{SOLD OUT} 12.13
 Echosmith ^{LOW TICKETS} 12.14
 The Scarlett Letter + BREADBOX + Always Her 12.16
 Soul Dye + Sunny Day Soap Opera + Eyes Buggy 12.17
 Taphy + Snailsex + Dirty Hands 12.18
 Ax & The Hatchetmen ^{LOW TICKETS} 12.19
 Cannibal Queen + Bad Luck Brigade + You Shall Know Our Velocity 12.20
 Cinders 12.21
 The Last Wild Buffalo 12.28
 Stage Fright + Anime Girlfriend + Citrus 12.30
 Persona 749: Album Release! 12.31
 Bleacher Babe 1.2

METRO MUSIC HALL

Devastation On The Nation feat: I Am Morbid 12.2
 KBP6 Launch Party! 12.4
 Eyes Like Jade 12.5
 JRC Bday Bash: Mythical Beasts 12.6
 Marrio Suzanne and The Galaxy Band 12.7
 Sad Girl Rock: Collette Astle + Sabrina Fair + Auhre + The Fillbusters 12.12
 Binding Vow 12.13
 Viva La Diva: Holly Jolly Diva 12.14
 Viva La Diva: Holly Jolly Diva 12.15
 Marrio Suzanne and The Galaxy Band 12.19
 Viva La Diva: Holly Jolly Diva 12.20
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 Viva La Diva: Holly Jolly Diva 12.22
 Temptaxxions 12.27
 Spirit Machines + Don't Apologize + The Hardy Brothers 12.28
 Viva La Diva: Divas New Years Eve 12.31
 Louder Than Hell: 80s Rock Night 1.2
 The Pickpockets 1.3
 Emo Night ^{LOW TICKETS} 1.10

URBAN LOUNGE

Matt Heckler + Casper Allen 12.3
 Quintessential: Album Release w/ You Shall Know Our Velocity + Sequoia's Faucet 12.4
 Blockhead 12.5
 Dubwise 18th Anniversary Party: DJUNYA + ILLOOM + RHIZAE + SFL1 12.6
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 Sam Greenfield 12.8
 KBP6 Local Highlight 12.10
 Wolves Of Glendale 12.11
 12 Bands of Christmas
 Del Perro, Casio Ghost, Cassette Drift, Get Born, Orange Soda, The Lip, Club Mungo, Molotov Dress, Nadezhda, Day Crash, Felix Indigo 12.12
 Birth Tay Par-Tay! - a Taylor Swift Themed Dance Party 12.13
 Friendsmas Eve: A Punk Rock X-Mas Midnite Rollercoaster 12.18
 SLUG LOCALIZED: Andrea Morton + Quinn Johnson + Clint Holt + Kendra Green (Comedy) 12.19
 The Snowball: Urban Lounge Holiday Party w/ DJ Spaz 12.20
 Luttrell 12.21
 The Narcs + Mopsy + English Budgies 12.27
 Sky Olson + Lennon Vanderdoes + Andy McFerren ^{LOW TICKETS} 12.28
 NYE at Urban Lounge: Flash & Flare + Jesse Walker + Spaz! 12.31



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