

The Michael Early Interview

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THE AMERICAN UNDERDOG Interview and Profile of Michael Early /Pool King Skateboards
Introduction and Interview by Jeff Tatum
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Michael Early is a genuine underdog in the American skate scene. Whether it's designing skate products, shaping skate decks, building skate parks, winning skate contests or starting a new age skate company, Michael has been a mover and groover in the skateboarding industry for over thirty years. At forty-six, Michael's skate life is still young and thriving. Michael has many skating aspirations planned for his future and is committed to accomplishing them. After recently converting to a long board, Michael is already the best over forty-five long board bowl rider in southern California, maybe the world. When it comes to heated pool sessions, Michael can hold his own with some of the best rippers in town. His latest contribution to skateboarding is one of the coolest skateboard companies to pop up for quite some time, Pool King Skateboards. Like everything Mr. Early does, Pool King comes from the heart. After starting as a hobby with the chance of being a success, Pool King Skateboards has evolved into a major skateboard industry contender. Mike's knack for vision and creation have both attributed to his company's success. Michael Early is the epitome of a true core skate addict.

[Click through to read Jeff Tatum's interview...]

JT: You have been riding and shaping all types of decks, short and long, for 30 plus years now but over the last few years your choice of deck has changed your approach and view of skating, why?

ME: Well, to start with we have concrete again! Ramps were a temporary solution –but concrete can be formed to do so much more and it lasts without the maintenance. Secondly, I have always ridden longer surfboards – so I wanted to apply the same concept to my skating – a longer board draws your style out. I was really bummed out on the “one shape fits all” mentality. Also, I really dig making a “custom” deck for myself. And finally, I started to hang and skate with some dude who rips a real long board.

JT: When you started riding long boards in pools and bowls did you make the change all at once or did you transition through a few different size boards?

ME: No, it was transitional. I started by messing around with width and length a little bit at a time. But the fun I was having finally took over and I realized I would just go for it and re-learn my skating on a longer, faster, more stylish deck.

JT: Why don't you have any tattoos?

ME: I'm not sure. I guess I haven't found something I want to wear for the rest of my life yet? I guess I'm just not into doing what the crowd does. However, I do have the scars of skating, do those count?

JT: Why don't you seem to like black clothes much?

ME: I love black – but I also love other colors – there are however some colors I can't stand, I'm not really sure why, I think it's genetic. I usually don't like what the crowd likes. I don't like tight shirts and skinny black pants. That's a total giveaway that you're a follower of the sheep.

JT: As a fully-grown, responsible adult with a family and two successful businesses does your addiction to skateboarding have any negative effect on your life?

ME: Yes and no – I love and hate skating at the same time. It has brought me some of the best times and enjoyment – and it has brought me some of my greatest pain. Crashing, breaking bones in my back, endless hipers, etc! It also altered the course of my life. As the parks of the Midwest closed in the early 80's, I made the trek to the then Mecca of skateboarding - Southern California – down south/San Diego. So I'm a transplant otherwise I might still be in Michigan working, hunting, and fishing and surfing the Great Lakes!

JT: As the owner of a successful skate company, where do you think the market is headed?

ME: Success is relative, but I think skating is expanding into all areas with a lot of new people and age groups. Remember skating is a relatively young sport and by the way Tony Hawk didn't invent skateboarding. Although he altered its route it will always be a sport that will progress and mutate until the human mind stops dreaming. I dream of skating in my sleep and then go and try to do the thing when I skate sometimes it works, sometimes not.

JT: The skateboarding culture as a whole has become divided over the pads or no pads controversy. What do you think about skate pads?

ME: Ahhh, yes, the Big Pad Issue. I look at it like this – I wear pads so I can skate the next day – if some people get hurt and can't skate because they think safety equipment is uncool and they bash themselves out of it, which means more runs for me, as far as contest markdowns for wearing pads that's just stupid.

JT: Knowing that skateboarding is a terrible business to go into why did you start Pool King Skateboards?

ME: Because I love skating and hate skating at the same time. Hey, didn't I say that already? Actually I really enjoy designing, riding, and turning on other people to something other than the same old “pop” deck skate scene. But, hey, life is a lot more than skating. My family, my belief in a Creator, surfing, snowboarding, blah blah blah…

JT: Could you give me a brief summary of your past skate history and involvement in the industry?

ME: I started skating in June, 1975. My cousins in Florida were surfers and skaters, so on a trip down there they let me ride a board – I went around their carport probably a million times and I was hooked. Skateboarder Magazine brought all the information to me every month. Also I was fortunate to have an old 1940's reservoir style pool at our house and my parents would let me skate in it in exchange for cleaning, patching, and painting it for swimming 2 or 3 months of the year. I was also involved in designing, building, and working at an indoor skate park in 1977 – Astro Speedway in Michigan, it didn't get that much photo exposure but it was a good, fun park with 3 pools 2 half pipes a replica of the infamous V.C. bowl and a cool little bank/bowl area. So full time skating year round, lots of Pro's and exposure to rad skating The Haut Team, Sims Team, Wentzle Ruml, Tony Alva, Steve Olson, pretty much the best skaters in the world would hit all our Midwest parks – Chris Yandall was probably one of the most influential guys

to get the Midwest skate parks and contest scene going. The GLSA (Great Lakes Skate Association) contest series was my launching pad to So Cal.

JT: Who would be your pick for the top 4 coolest skaters old or new taking into consideration image and contribution to skating?

ME: 2 answers here – 1. The cool pro without attitude that will skate for fun with the general public. 2. The kid with a good attitude that has fun and is willing to learn and accept advice and history lessons. 3. The guy who just wants to skate regardless of the cost and consequences. 4. The girl or women who skate with style and rip and show up the guys.

So many people have contributed in design, riding, photos and exposure, but for skaters – my old crew I skated with on my trip. Jon Bishop, “Herod” Anson, Kit Shigur, Tommy Cox (the dudes I grew up with.) As far as pros Jeff Tatum, Tony Alva, Kevin Reed, Steve Olsen, Brad Bowman, Doug Demontmorency, Arthur Lake, and Benji Galloway – all guys I felt had rad, electric style, innovators before the kick flipping/rail sliding plague hit the skating world – there were and are so many dudes that rip skating to mention here it would take pages of names.

JT: Do you think that skating sucks and if so why? And why do you still do it?

ME: I don’t like street skating mainly because its usually crummy conditions, after skating 300-400 or more skate parks, pools, and spots I really crave perfection and I love transition. I “dislike” close-minded skaters. Final Answer: Yes and No. Some aspects I love and some I loathe. I do it because I get the same feeling I get when I first learned to skate – a total rush and added to that, the thing that all humanity has always wanted to do – “Fly”!