

# WADE NOMURA

In the early 1980s, BMX bike tricks were currency on the youth street cred market. The BMX scene, “was getting hot and heavy,” says Wade Nomura, who was in the center of it all. Then in his mid-20s, he hopped on a bike and rode it all the way to three national racing championships and to being recognized in five sanctions. Nomura not only mastered the rugged dirt racetracks, he created the “Nomura bike,” a model that squeezed every possible ounce of performance from a BMX frame.

Nomura, a sharp-featured, fit man, slightly less enthusiastic than a personal trainer, remembers how he stumbled upon the BMX scene by accident. Working on a landscaping job in the late 1970s, he happened upon a group of underprivileged teens with big BMX dreams. “When you walked around, you didn’t see a road bike. Everybody had BMX bikes,” Nomura says. That encounter morphed into the Nomura Racing bike shop in Santa Barbara and a team of racers.

That’s when Wade went to work redesigning the bikes. Looking back on the labor of love, he says, “The technology I saw had not evolved for 20 years.” Working in his shop, Nomura designed a bike out of aircraft aluminum, knocking about 10 pounds off the weight, and altering specs to get more leverage out of racers’ legs. “People learned how to race my bike,” he says. The Nomura team pedaled to nine national championships in its first season. His bikes sprung off the blocks. “Ninety percent of the race is the start,” he says.

Then, Nomura remembers, came the day when he flirted with the idea of racing. He was an old fogey in the sport at 26, but a big opportunity came at an ama-

teur National Championship event in 1979. Organizers announced a new race in a new division, 26 and up, and he seized the opportunity to take his first national championship. For the following two seasons, he won the amateur national crown and carried three national championship distinctions over a three-year period in five sanctioned circuits. *BMX Magazine* called him “the winningest amateur,” calculating that he’d won 85 percent of his races.

Still his shop and racing weren’t that glamorous. “People asked: ‘When are you gonna get a real job,’” he says.

At age 30 in 1982, he went pro. “I don’t think anybody has ever turned pro at 30,” he says. At his professional peak, he ranked 12th in the world. Nomura smirks recalling when he turned down an offer to play himself in the movie “Rad,” an industry-driven feature about a conflicted teenager making a difference with his BMX. His career-ending race was in Las Vegas in 1984. At full speed, he remembers shooting up a 10-foot jump. At the top, his bike sank in a soft patch of dirt; his body, an object in motion, flung 16 feet into the air. He landed on his shoulder and sustained serious damage.

He tried to race again, but “lost the edge,” he says. “I was competing against teenagers, and those guys come back in an instant.” Nomura quit cold turkey. He stopped manufacturing bikes and settled into family life and his landscaping business.

In 2001, he got an affirming trip down memory lane as part of the Japanese American National Museum’s exhibit “More Than a Game: Sport in the Japanese American Community.”

Wade Nomura, fourth from left, in *Bicycle Motocross Action Magazine*, Sept. 1981. Nomura placed first in the JAG BMX race in Costa Mesa. The other “news factor” in the magazine was the new “26 and over class” for BMX races, which had been solely for a younger set.

OPPOSITE, present day portrait. Today, Councilman Nomura’s focus is on serving his community. He rode to victory in last November’s Carpinteria City Council race.





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