

Pushing Boundaries with Lakey Peterson

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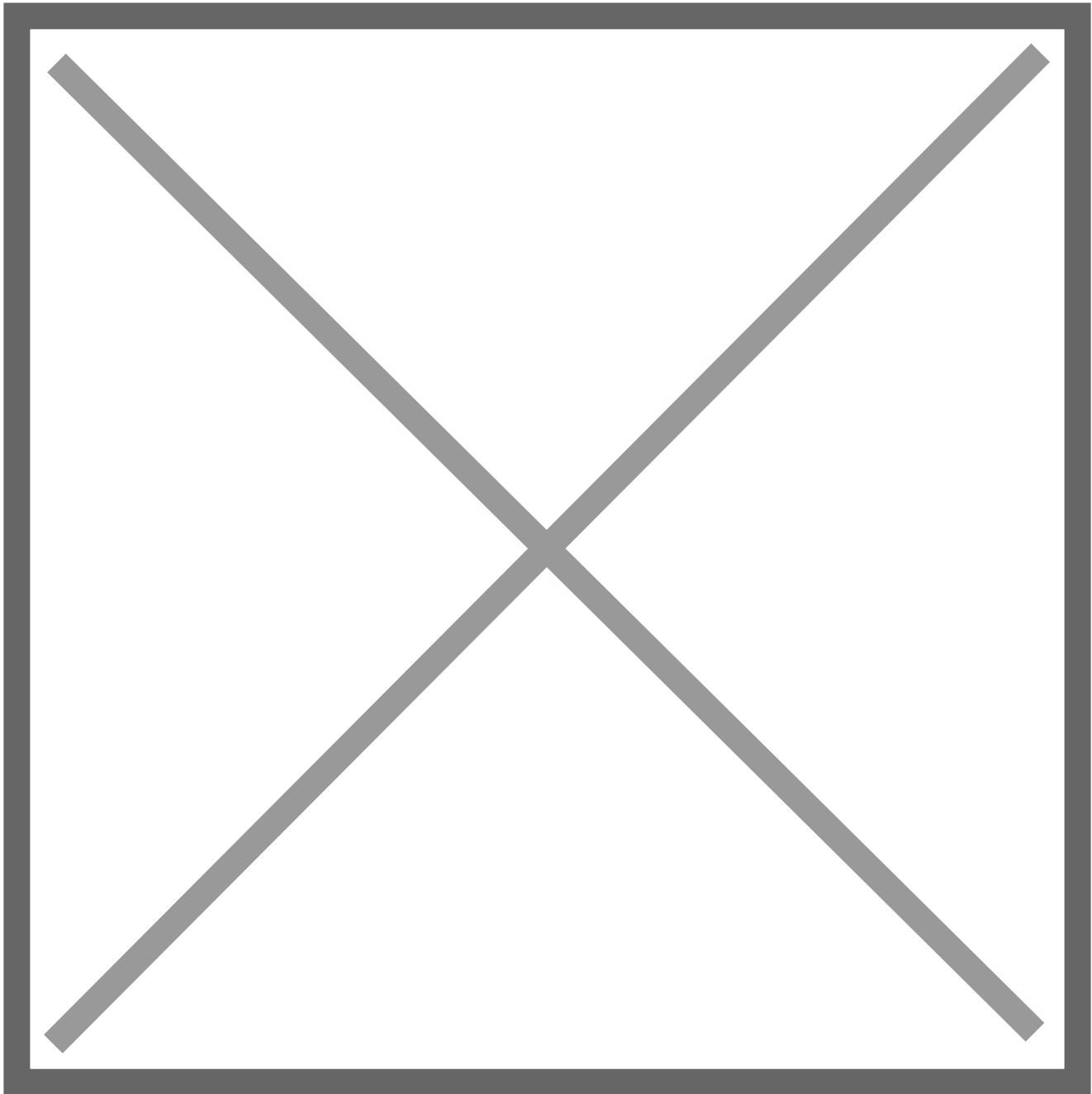
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For female athletes, the surfing world has an almost literal glass ceiling: “Girls don’t land aerials.” Since she was 14 years old, U.S. Olympic Hopeful and Team Toyota athlete, [Lakey Peterson](#), has been blowing that misconception right out of the water.

Growing up in Santa Barbara, California, Peterson was naturally drawn to the ocean. Though she got her start as a competitive swimmer, she quickly discovered that her real passion was surfing. In 2009, at just 14 years old, Peterson qualified to compete in the Open Women's/ Governor's Cup final, the championship of the National Scholastic Surfing Association (NSSA).

"I was new on the scene, a bit of a dark horse," she says. "I was kind of feeling, 'Wow, no one believes me. No one even knows who I am.' So, I went out and was like, 'I made this national event, so I'm going to just try and do it in the air.'"



That last-minute decision made quite the splash: Peterson became the first female to complete an aerial maneuver in competition — and won the championship. (Those types of maneuvers had been much more common for men at the time). Given the unpredictable nature of the action sport, it's this kind of adaptability that helps Peterson succeed in the surfing world.

“The ocean is always changing,” she says. “It can really humble you like that. You have to learn how to be adaptable.”

Surfing culture may have a laid-back, flexible attitude, but that doesn't mean that the athletes take competition lightly. “Everyone trains so hard,” she says.

And now that surfing is making its debut at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 — something Peterson thought she would not get to see during her professional career — she's in the water for two to four hours a day working on some moves she hopes to debut on the Olympic stage.

“I always try to be pretty progressive,” she says. “The progression of the aerial side of things has just escalated like crazy in the last 10 years, but it's still not that common for girls.”

Still, Peterson is not done pushing. Next, she wants to devote her energy toward promoting women's participation and involvement in surfing.

“I think the next step for women's surfing is getting girls to be more comfortable with doing airs and being more out there,” she says. “I'm kind of committed to pushing boundaries that people think they can't break. It's definitely something that I practice and is on my mind, 100%.”



And anytime her confidence wavers, Peterson takes herself back to the 2009 Nationals.

“That was the moment I started my impossible because I think a lot of people just thought ‘girls don’t do that,’” she says. “It’s impossible or it’s not normal for them to try.”

“I decided, ‘No, I’m going to go do it. I know I can do it.’ That was a turning point for me, when I realized I can make anything possible.”

To learn more about Lakey Peterson, [click here](#)