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Skateboarding is a growing trend at Po Leung Kuk Ho Yuk Ching (1984) College. Photo: Joanne Ma

Get on board with skating

Grazed knees, twisted ankles and aching muscles: for Hong Kong's new generation of skaters, falling is all part of the fun, writes **Joanne Ma**

The hardest part of Luk Kwan-yun's week is waiting for Friday, when he can skateboard.

"I skate at school every Friday," the 16-year-old told *Young Post*. "Monday is the saddest day of the week; the long wait for Friday to come around is such a torture. But when I finally skate, I'm happy."

Kwan-yun isn't alone in his love of the sport. When *Young Post* visited him at his school, Po Leung Kuk Ho Yuk Ching (1984) College, he was cruising around the playground with a group of friends. Occasionally, they kicked up and flipped their boards into the air. They were warming up for a competition later on.

Last month, the college held Hong Kong's first skateboarding competition at a local school. While small in scale, the event was big in talent. Seven students from the school took turns to showcase their tricks and techniques,

while their classmates cheered them on, some even shouting from the corridors on upper floors.

The event was organised by Hong Kong Skateboarding Academy, which was founded two years ago to offer professional help to amateur skaters. It now visits schools around the city to promote skateboarding culture.

Twenty six-year-old instructor and founder of the academy, Cheung Hang-tat, explains that many of its members are students who often struggle academically and are overlooked at school. Skateboarding helped give them confidence their own abilities.

"This competition also allows teachers, the principal and everyone else to see them differently," he says. "Studying isn't the only way out to be successful."

The students agree that skateboarding gives them a sense of belonging.

"Even though skateboarding seems like an individual sport, it's really not," says Yeung Tsz-chun, 15, who took part in the contest. "Whenever I skate with my friends, I get this intense feeling of excitement, as if we're all on fire."

The teens are all very supportive of one another, too. "When someone finally achieves a trick, we'll all yell and be super glad for him or her," says Tsz-chun.

Anson Shu Yat-san, 15, tells *Young Post* he had been practising to leap over another skateboard. "I started off by just learning to jump with my skateboard, then I began hopping over the lines on the ground. After that, I tried different smaller obstacles. Finally, it was the skateboard."

While that may sound relatively simple, the reality was rough; it took Anson two years of constant practice to perfect the trick. Cheung said that skateboarding is the type of sport

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where no one can have a natural advantage over someone else. "My students are able to skate and do tricks not because they were born talented, but because they try hard."

"Sometimes I would graze my legs when I tried to hop over a barrier and they would start bleeding," Tsz-chun recounts. "When you skateboard, you can't be afraid of falling. It's an inevitable part of the whole experience."

Kwun-yun has a similar story. "I was learning this trick and I twisted my ankle two or three times. Every time, my ankle would swell up to the size of an egg." The experience taught Kwun-yun that perseverance is the key to success. "You must persevere to achieve something, and there's no short-cut. Just like me: after twisting my ankle a few times, I did it."

The 16-year-old also ended up being crowned champion of the skateboarding competition and walked away with a medal, a pair of NIKE shoes and a brand new skateboard.

When asked about his coach, Kwun-yun grins. "We get along very well," he says of Cheung. "He is sincere and puts his heart into teaching us. Whenever he spots a mistake, however tiny, he'll tell us the right way to do it. He's such a good friend."