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THE RISING STARS OF SURF

Past pros dish the straight story on today's talent and the next generation of surfers. *By Debbie Lavdas*



Rising surf stars Taylor Pitz and Shane Chapman out at Thalia Street Beach.



NATHANIEL HARRINGTON

ADAM MEJIA

WILL THE NEXT BIG NAME IN SURF COME OUT OF LAGUNA?

One thing's for sure: The scene today is very different than it was in the past, and some nearby towns like Huntington have a more competitive scene. But with many big names in the surfing world mentoring the next generation, there are still plenty of up-and-coming groms to watch.

NEXT GREAT WAVE

"It's been a while since Laguna produced a big name, and I think we are overdue," says famed Laguna Beach surfer Jeff Booth—formerly one of the top five on the World Tour in the '90s and current national sales manager at Billabong. "Laguna, unfortunately, has never put a premium on contest surfing compared to Huntington or San Clemente. Our surfers are more like great free surfers who enjoy the culture and travel, similar to a Dave Rastovich type," he says. Jeff knows that being a great contest surfer requires a huge amount of sacrifice and time spent traveling up and down the coast to compete. "Laguna is such a comfortable place, it's hard to get outside its borders. This has always been our challenge," he comments.

Jeff's picks for ones to watch include LBHS grads Taylor Pitz and Porter Hogan, high school students Adam Mejia, Shane Chapman and Michael Chapman, and a crop of focused kids at the middle school level.

How do these up-and-coming groms get groomed? Jeff says that it's all about the pecking order in the Laguna Beach lineup. "The younger surfers are taught the ropes by the older generation. Our generation was always held in check. When a grom got too big for their britches, they quickly got put back in line. Now you can't do anything to a kid because of legal issues. So we try to set the right example and hope they follow along," he says.



QUINN MATTHEWS

SHANE CHAPMAN

FIERCE COMPETITION

Scott Finn, LBHS surf team coach and former pro surfer, says there is a cluster of young surfers that are very talented. "They could all beat each other on any given day," he says. "Shane Chapman, Michael Chapman, Harrison Kirkman, Cameron Zuziak, Tobie Grierson and Leah Pakpour. In the next few years these are the surfers to look out for because they spend a lot of time in the water."

Scott encourages the kids to excel in the classroom and in the water. "We base our program around this philosophy and encourage the kids to put academics and well-being ahead of surfing. A healthy balance is important," he says.

Balance is something Steven "Sli Dawg" Chew talks to the kids about in his surf camp. "It's all about balance, balancing your life," says Steven, who competed against Kelly Slater in high school and was on the national team. He now runs Laguna Beach Surf School. "There are so many more surfers these days, everyone wants to get a piece of the action; competition is way more fierce and there's big money figures for the top pros," he says. "You've got top surf companies courting these 16- and 17-year-old kids and giving them six-figure contracts, so parents, too, have to find that balance with the travel and school and all."



JODY TIONGCO

Pro Surfer Jeff Booth and son Travis checking the surf at Thalia Street Beach.



TOM SERVANS

TRAVIS BOOTH

STAR GRAD TAYLOR PITZ LBHS GRADUATE

She's the top talent from Laguna right now, competing for UCLA in the NSSA College Series, as well as surfing in the ASP North America Pro Junior Series. Taylor is riding for Billabong between studying pre-business economics. Despite all this, Taylor says she's no natural at the sport.

How she moved up the ranks: "I absolutely love to surf. I've put in a lot of hours in the water, and it has really paid off for me." Taylor credits Laguna's wealth of surf opportunities—from contests like Brooks Street, teams at Thurston and LBHS and local companies and surf shop sponsorship support—with shaping the town's best surfers.

Her advice to the younger groms: "It's really important to keep everything in perspective. Sometimes when I'm training or getting ready for a competition and I don't have a good session, I'll find myself more mad when I get out of the water than when I got in. Surfing, especially in Laguna, is an experience that not many people will ever have in their lifetime. So even if you don't have a great session, just enjoy being in the water and have a good time."

Jason "Watto" Watson, who manages Laguna Surf and Sport (a hangout for groms) says, "In Laguna, the kids skimboard, they surf, they skateboard, ride beater boards. The kids in this town are more about just having a ton of fun. We've got big brother-style relationships with the kids. And Brooks Street and the Spring Fever Surfabout give the kids a sense of identity and friendly competition."

BROOKS STREET BOARDERS

Brandy Faber, organizer of the Brooks Street Surfing Classic gives his slant on how the legendary contest helps determine those with the greatest potential. "Brooks Street has always been a filter for surfers. The wave dictates and weeds

out the best from the worst," he says.

Brandy adds that there is a lull in the talent pool, which may be due to several reasons. "Right now, the surf scene is totally different than it was when we surfed," he says. "We were surfers and that was it. The '80s generation of surfers were very competitive and pushed each other on a daily basis, which spilled over onto the national level." Today, the kids have a lot more distractions in general: "You see it on many levels, not just with surfing," Brandy says. "I think that local energy is being poured into downhill skateboarding. The kids aren't hungry like they used to be."

He points out how in highly competitive towns like Huntington Beach, some of the kids are home-schooled so that they can practice



CHRIS GRANT/JETTYGIRL

TAYLOR PITZ

BROS TO KNOW SHANE CHAPMAN LBHS ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

"I had an epic first surf team season this year," Shane says. He gives props to the team and coach and says his biggest supporters have been his bros at Laguna Surf and Sport—in and out of the water. His current goal is taking his surfing to its full potential: "I'm looking forward to my next three years at Laguna Beach High School. My future dream would be to make the UCSC surf team."

ON HIS CULTURE GROWING UP: "My dad started taking my twin brother and I out paddling since we could first swim. It didn't take long before I was hooked. I think I was 5 years old when I first paddled in on my own. My brother Michael and I have been stoked on surfing ever since."

ADAM MEJIA SENIOR AT LBHS

"This was a pretty good year for me, had a lot of good heats, came up with a couple firsts and was given a Coach's Pick award, as well as making the semi finals at league final," Adam says. He's focused on getting better and building self-esteem before he does any major contests.

HIS GOAL: "God-willing maybe one day be on the World Championship Tour, but only time will tell."

ON LAGUNA: "Laguna is different; it's unique and gives you more of a family vibe. Even with the rousing in the water, it's all in fun and makes us want to perform better."

HIS MOTTO: "Be not afraid, only believe."



SHANE CHAPMAN



ADAM MEJIA

Steven "Sli-Dawg" Chew
and his surf camp crew



QUINN MATTHEWS

NATHANIEL HARRINGTON



LBHS SURF TEAM

surf and compete. "If Laguna surfers want to make it to the next level, they have to try harder than surrounding cities, as our waves aren't as diverse and it's just not as competitive as other surf cities," Brandy says.

PRO DADS AND THE NEXT GREAT GROM

With Laguna Beach groms being pushed to strive harder to make it to the next level, a question arises about when our town will see another natural talent emerge. With pro surfer dads introducing their offspring to the sport, it's an ever-growing possibility.

World Tour pro Jeff Booth is now a father with a son, Travis, 11, who surfs—and surfs well. This "professional dad teaches son to killer surf" theme is a pattern in the scene of Laguna up-and-comers.

Brandy says, "It's still too early to say, but I look to the next generation of Dante Madrigal (son of Darren 'Dagwood' Madrigal), Travis Booth, Trey and Tyson Lockhart (sons of pro Bobby Lockhart), as those who could be the next great generation of surfers to come out of Laguna. These kids' dads are pros, so by osmosis they're around it all more. Their dads are surfing with their kids, going to watch the competitions and the kids just learn and grow quicker."

Darren Madrigal, who is the Thurston Middle School surf team coach now, says, "Travis Booth has the surfer's instincts like his dad, and he will be one to watch." He agrees that the same goes for Bobby Lockheart's boys. "Trey and Tyson are definitely on the radar as up-and-comers too."

"Bobby Gavin is really into surf contests; he has a personal coach and is a very strong surfer for his age," he adds. "If he keeps doing what he's doing, he could be our next Jeff Booth." He also mentions Davis Price, Jake Levine, Zach Levine, Dylan Davis and Jeremy Shutts, who Darren says are always out charging the bigger waves in town.

When Laguna's tides will change and bring a wave of pro surfers is still up for debate, but hopes are high that the '80s surf groms will raise the 2010 decade of World Championship Tour winners. For now, eyes are on Taylor Pitz, Adam Mejia, Shane Chapman and the sons of Laguna's best. **LBM**