

With or Without an Escort?

Swimmers Disagree on Channel Test

By BOB KRAUSS
Advertiser Columnist

A difference of opinion on technique may stop what could have been one of the great swimming tests — a duel across the treacherous 32-mile wide Alenuihaha Channel from Maui to the Big Island.

The swimmers are Hawaiian pilot-fisherman Leo Ohai and dentist Harry Hoffaker.

Both men deny they are challenging the other to a test of endurance. Yet, both have said they are willing to swim across tempestuous Alenuihaha Channel.

Their approaches to the difficult feat are completely different.

Hoffaker, who swam the Molokai Channel in 13½ hours in 1967, wants to swim with an escort boat under favorable weather conditions.

Ohai, who swam 21½ hours to safety after ditching his small plane in the Molokai Channel in 1967, refuses to use an escort boat and says the weather doesn't make any difference.

The 29-year-old swimming dentist has been in training for several months. He hopes to cross Alenuihaha Channel.

On Monday, Hoffaker said

there is considerable difference between spending 21 hours adrift and a purposeful swim against time.

"Many can float for survival," he said. "But to swim at a rate of 56 strokes per minute for 13½ hours takes a great deal of physical and mental conditioning."

"I'd welcome him (Ohai) along in the Alenuihaha Channel if he feels capable of making the swim."

Yesterday Ohai, 46, called to accept the invitation.

"This is not a challenge but he invited me along," Ohai said. "I'm happy to accommodate him. We don't need any escort boat or food or water. No offense. But we'll just go alone."

"We don't need to train for three hours a day (Ohai often spends six to 12 hours in the water working nets). The weather doesn't mean a damn thing. It's in your mind. I'm not saying we'll make it. That's a wild channel."

"But I'll go if it's just the two of us. I'll go tomorrow if he wants to. We'll just charter a plane and land at Upolu Point, have something to eat and hop into the water. Then we'll see about mental conditioning."

What happens if the swimmers get into trouble?

"We can help each other," Ohai said. "And if we get tired we can 'drift' back to Hawaii."

After Ohai hung up to work nets of a fishing boat anchored off Waikiki, I relayed

A Bob Krauss SPECIAL

his message to Hoffaker who was fixing somebody's teeth.

"It's interesting to think about," he said. "But I don't think it's feasible without an escort boat. And I disagree about the weather. It would be foolish to go when the small craft warnings are up."

Hoffaker said a swimmer named Ted May struck out across the English Channel alone in 1950. Three weeks later his body was washed up on the coast of Belgium.

"I'm not going to give myself any handicap that's not necessary," he said. "Even with the same escort boat it would be difficult. In the English Channel swimmers sometimes share the same boat to save money. But it

doesn't work out.

"There's nothing to stop him from going over alone. He could prove his point. I'd certainly be impressed if he did this."

Ohai and Hoffaker have widely different attitudes toward endurance swimming.

Ohai, who swims for a living, believes that there is no sense in swimming the Molokai Channel unless you have to.

When he was approached with the idea of swimming the channel with Hoffaker in 1967 (the approach was apparently made without Hoffaker's knowledge), he refused unless the swim would be strictly between the two men with no escort boat and no publicity.

Also, Ohai suggested that the two men start on Maui and swim to Molokai, have lunch, then swim on to Oahu.

Hoffaker, who swims for sport, says the whole idea is that you don't have to, that anything is harder if you don't have to do it.

"It is harder to start and harder to keep going knowing that one is starting of his own free will and that the escort boat is only five yards away," he said.

Hoffaker said one of the objectives of distance swimming is to see how fast it can be done. He said he figured the crossing of Alenuihaha Channel from Upolu Point on Hawaii to near La Perouse Bay on Maui will take between 16 and 20 hours.

Ohai estimated it might take 40 hours to make the swim.

"And if the wind is blowing like it is today, I wouldn't start at Upolu," he said. "I'd start at Honokaa and swim straight for Hana. It's five miles farther but you start from Upolu and you'll never make it."

Hoffaker said oceanographers had recommended he start from Upolu Point. He has been waiting on a day-to-day basis for good weather conditions to start his attempt of the channel. A team of volunteers from the Outrigger Canoe Club will accompany him in an escort boat.

He said he would be happy to meet Ohai and talk with him about the possibility of a swim in which the swimmers might take a different course and choose different starting points. Also, each man could take along an escort boat or not as he wished.

HAWAII TIMES
MAR. 28 1969

1968 U.S. Volleyball Champions From Calif. To Compete In Hawaii

The Pacific Coast Club volleyball team from Long Beach, California, the 1968 AAU Senior Men's (35 years and over) National Champions, will invade Hawaii come March 28th, via United Airlines at 2:15 p.m.. This outstanding volleyball club will have 8 members making the jaunt to Hawaii and will compete in Hilo during the week of April 4th through the 6th in the Haile Church Invitational Tournament. This event is sanctioned by the United States Volleyball Association and is a Double "AA" tournament.

Some of the finest competitors on the American volleyball scene, many of whom have been on U.S. Olympic and Pan-American squads, will augment the PCC team including Jim Montague, Dick Hammer, Vern Gragson, Windy Skelton, Joe Riddick, Al Larson, Howard Walker and Gene Chambliss. Montague, many times All-American, along with Gragson and Hammer were selected to the All-American first team in the 1968 senior division. Montague, pound for pound is one of the finest defensive ballplayers in the world, was elected to the U.S. Volleyball Association Hall of Fame. He is 40 years old and was a member of the 1950 Long Beach national open championship squad and the Long Beach Century Sports Club team that won the national crown in 1960.

The PCC team will once again play the Outrigger Canoe Club in a series of exhibition matches here in Honolulu along with Church College of Hawaii and Central YMCA. Their up-coming game with Outrigger could easily be a rematch of last year's national's which was held in Portland, Oregon. The Outrigger won over PCC in an early match that placed PCC in the loser's bracket. PCC worked back up and defeated the Outrigger forcing a double finals and successfully clinch the 1968 crown.

Assisting the PCC team here in Hawaii: Tommy Haines—Captain and All-American great and member of the Outrigger team, Moroni Medeiros—former island and Roosevelt all-around athlete who resided in Long Beach for many years, John Lowell—Church College of Hawaii physical education administrator and a member of the USVBA board of directors and Sam Koonui, coach of the Central YMCA team.



MAR. 27 1969

Surf Spray



by Ron Haworth

A late surge

It probably would be wise to take the results of the third annual Surf Spray poll to the office of Lieutenant Governor Tom Gill for arbitration.

With the smoke over the Akizaki-Fong race in the 15th District hardly blown seaward, Gill appears a logical choice to take on still another headache.

Briefly, the dilemma has arisen over some questionable ballots concerning the best Hawaii male surfer.

Surf Spray is faced with 161 late votes cast for a single candidate. Readers might recall that Tom Gill and his office ran into much the same sticky problem, except Gill's concern was over something like 19 absentee votes, hardly comparable to 161 questionables.

The candidates involved are Fred Hemmings and Jock Sutherland. When the polls officially closed March 18, Hemmings had clearly swept all opposition aside with a most impressive popular vote.

His nearest rival was Sharon Weber — and she wasn't in the same district!

However and alas, between the time the polls closed and the votes were tabulated for "live and instant" release, somebody slyly stuffed the ballot box with SUTHERLANDS.

In a breath — my surprised one — Sutherland rallied from a sure wipe out on a hot curl to first place. Or has he? Should those late votes be voided? It's a ticklish situation.

Committee of one

In an effort to be fair, Surf Spray declared itself neutral and called upon a special board of inquiry. The chairman and committee consisted of a very fair-minded 12-year-old.

We know Tracy, our daughter, is fair-minded because she agreed (under threats of loss of allowance) to stop waving her campaign sign around Koko Head Elementary.

Somewhat "Mo betta, Freddie" didn't fit into the media picture.

This year's race was won on the campus. Both Hemmings and Sutherland had crafty campaign managers getting out the school vote.

The most successful means was petition ballot. Here a dedicated soul carried a soiled scrap of notebook paper around to his classes obtaining signatures for his hero.

The petition ballot appears a much more orderly means of expressing personal choice than breaking windows and burning libraries.

Naturally, care must be exercised that no duplication of signatures occurs. Especially noticed in this area was a particular Ewa Beach family that got carried away in the excitement and voted twice.

(At this point our fair-minded chairman grabbed for 'Mo betta, Freddie.')

Another problem was incurred when one voter mixed his spelling test with the petition ballot. The spelling test flunked the poll, which is more than likely what his petition ballot did when it crossed the teacher's desk.

Will we ever know who those votes were for?

The people's choice

Bluntly, Sutherland was the candidate of the Hawaii Surfing Association. The HSA emptied its coffers and backed Sutherland to the tune of 48 cents in postage.

Hemmings, long an outspoken dissenter of HSA policy, appealed to the grass roots voter, the individual who would strike a blow against the "big country machine."

Maybe wisely, neither candidate was present during the short, spirited campaign. Hemmings wintered in Miami and Sutherland remained in seclusion on Maui.

While Surf Spray doesn't have an absolute undisputed winner, it can report on the remainder of the poll.

Jim Blears edged Joey Cabell and Ben Aipa for third place in the men's division. Sharon Weber was an easy gal winner and Blears came back to nab the most under-rated title.

Now if we take these results and compare them with the HSA awards of last Sunday which had Aipa and Martha Sunn at the top and put Sutherland into second place where he finished in the HSA tallies, we arrive at Hemmings winning the Surf Spray poll.

And it's all fair and square!