



By Ron Haworth



Winner Nat Young, right, shakes hands with runner-up Felipe Pomar as Jimmy Blears (far left) and Ryan Dotson (right), who finished third and fourth respectively, look on.

From the Acorn Grows the Oak

When Larry Lindberg, independent television producer, met in December 1968 at the Hilton Hawaiian Village with twenty of the world's top surfers during a lull in the Duke Kahanamoku Classic, it is doubtful any could have predicted the 1970 Smirnoff World Pro-Am spawned from that gathering.

But from sown seedling do tilled ambitions grow to market commodities.

Lindberg was not a novice to the sport, having filmed (16mm), beginning with CBS and then ABC, all the Duke contests. In '68 he was assisted by two of the best surfing photographers in the business, Greg MacGillivray and Jim Freeman. He was also first to televise surfing from a helicopter. But his vision for the sport's TV survival was not solely focused from behind the camera lens.

Kimo McVay introduced the Duke Classic as an amateur event in 1965 with Fred Van Dyke running the contests with the aid of Outrigger's Fred Hemmings Jr. selecting the contestants.

"It was Lindberg who suggested Kimo award winner-take-all \$1,000 prize money in '68, won by Californian Mike Doyle," Hemmings recalled.

Hemmings claims professional surfing in its early years produced more network TV coverage for Hawaii than any other sport.

Lindberg envisioned a professional surfing organization, one which held members to high standards of conduct and would help them gain endorsements from potential sponsors. That, in itself, was a challenge. Right or wrong the general public did not have a high opinion of the stereotyped vagabond long haired Joe Surfer.

The International Professional Surfers Association was

The IPSA Is Born

formed in name only at that meeting and Van Dyke was elected president.

Surfers who signed letters of intent at that historic gathering read like a Surfing Hall of Fame: Eddie Aikau, Ben Aipa, Jimmy Blears, Corky Carroll, Ryan Dotson, Midget Farrelly, Charlie Galanto, Ricky Grigg, Jeff Hackman, Billy Hamilton, Fred Hemmings, Mark Martinson, Rusty Miller, Walt Phillips, Felipe Pomar, Paul Strauch, Mike Tarkington, and Nat Young.

IPSA Growing Pains

The idea briefly languished for lack of an entrepreneur's hand at the helm.

Several months after IPSA inception, OCC's Ron Sorrell (who was not in Hilton attendance) telephoned Van Dyke and offered a series of ideas to enhance the IPSA appeal to prospective sponsors. As is often the case with visionary concepts, it takes a willingness to pick up the gauntlet and bring ideas to reality. Van Dyke was quick to seize upon the merit and zeal in Sorrell's presentation and appointed him IPSA commissioner.

"One of the first challenges I faced" said Sorrell, "was to draft a charter. I spent tedious hours at the public library researching professional sport charters until I finally decided to model the IPSA Charter after professional golf (PGA) because it was relatively young and golf was still in its TV infancy as compared to other sports."

Embodied in the charter were the aims of the IPSA:

- To elevate the standard of the profession.
- To promote interest in surfing.
- To protect the mutual interest of members.
- To promote contests.

The standing committees were Admissions, Disciplinary, Judging, and Management.

Counseling Sorrell in the dollars-and-cents world of commercial television was OCC fellow member Bob Wilson, past president and vice-president of California Broadcasting Association and Corinthian Broadcasting, respectively.

BYOB

Ironically, IPSA's foray into surfing came when television was abandoning, not adopting, the sport. The casualties included the once prominent International Surfing Championships at Makaha and the United States Surfboard Championships at Huntington Beach, CA. Only the Duke Classic survived. Further handicapping IPSA goals was the fact Smirnoff '70 could not be televised due to advertising hard liquor on TV was taboo.

The consequences for future contests not involving liquor sponsors were thoroughly examined by Sorrell and Wilson.

Wilson opined, "Surfing has as much excitement and action than any sport now on the tube; wipeout danger in big surf rides tandem on every wave. Furthermore, it has more visual beauty because surfing is on call in the world's most glamorous locations."

Sorrell believed excitement was needed to educate and catapult the TV couch viewer and beach spectator. "The

snowed-in, bored viewer in Wichita needs to become a part of the action, to root for a personal favorite.”

Analysis of the status quo unearthed one fatal audience flaw. The viewer, whether novice or sophisticated, was not kept in the loop through heat scoring into finals; only judges knew the points accumulated. What other sport kept the score a secret? The PA narrative was prudent enough to blend adjectives but not explanations.

The IPSA wisely adapted a ride-by-ride scoring system, thereby cultivating viewer interest; the viewer gained performance knowledge and was quick to second guess a bad score.

“Don’t forget, everybody wants to be an umpire,” said Sorrell.

Smirnoff had in ‘69 sponsored a non-televised pro meet in Santa Cruz, CA. It proved to be seriously flawed with contestants still competing after nightfall and surfer identification was a casualty; non-competitors would not clear the water. The sponsor could ill afford a repeat performance.

Smirnoff ‘69 was not IPSA sanctioned.

Sorrell Drum Beating

The selling of the IPSA concept to potential sponsors and media fell solely to Sorrell. Letters touting IPSA goals and benefits solicited major corporations like Dole, Pan America World Airway, General Motors, Tanya Hawaii and others.

“You have our attention,” feedback was near unanimous.

One five- day California junket for Heublein, Inc.

(Smirnoff) had Sorrell visiting six cities, meeting with press and radio/TV people. In Los Angeles Sorrell shared a panel with Maxie Baughn (LA Rams), football coaches John McKay (USC) and Tommy Prothro (UCLA), and Los Angeles Lakers general manager Fred Schaus.

Talk about bringing a knife to a gun fight!

The ultimate goal of the IPSA was to hold thirteen global contests annually. Sports Headliners, Inc. showed definite interest in contracting with a world champion.

Van Dyke was quoted in Honolulu *Star-Bulletin’s* Surf Spray he and the committee chose the Duke Kahanamoku contestants 90 percent on ability and 10 percent on character. IPSA took this percentage to the extreme. Before the Smirnoff Pro-Am surfers were approved, Sorrell had them vetted by OCC’s Tom Conner who was then with HPD. Spreadsheets came back to Sorrell listing any criminal behavior.

On To Makaha

The 1970 Smirnoff was a pioneering mobile contest demanding a Winnebago be used as command post. Pro meet director Hemmings and amateur contest beach captain Paul Strauch had authority to call the location after pre-dawn checks from North Shore spotters.

Smirnoff’s success that day blended a memorable history. The surfers came away with a sense of having been associated with what most considered a true professional contest. The

new IPSA scoring was hailed by Aussie winner Nat Young (a gentleman quick to critique judging).

Young and Peruvian Felipe Pomar and four other finalists had the crowd breathless but still cheering their back and forth rooster tail daring in 15-foot plus surf for the \$2,000 winner’s share of the \$4,500 purse. Spectators’ eyes flitted between surfer and wave and the changing scoreboard. Elation and dejection was evident as personal favorites’ fortunes rose and fell. Judges had to go to the eleventh wave between Young and Pomar before declaring the winner.

Pomar, ever the good sport, shook hands with Young before he was seen leaving Makaha with the consolation prize-Miss Smirnoff.

The Bottom Line

Following Smirnoff Gregg Reynolds, Western Director of Publicity for Heublein gave IPSA the following coverage summary beginning three months prior to the contest.

- Newspaper sport page: 35 million circulations with 100 million readership.
- Television/radio: 30 cities, 21 states, 40 million homes.
- Magazines: *Sports Illustrated, Sunset, and Continental Airlines “Flighttime”*.
- Voice of America carried it worldwide.
- Heublein spent in excess of \$50,000, excluding prize money, promoting Smirnoff Pro-Am and figured the money well spent. They estimated equivalent time and space in another venue would have run as much as \$200,000.

Forty-six years later in February 2016 John John Florence won \$75,000 in The Eddie-but it can be claimed the template of sound management, fundamentals, and reality of today’s professional surfing on the world’s waves grew from the Lindberg meeting and IPSA acorn with some insightful guidance and hard work by some members of the Outrigger Canoe Club.

Koa Log Shavings

The IPSA story could not be complete without mentioning that Sorrell, Wilson (TV & Radio Media), Fred Hemmings (Contests) and this writer handling public and press relations did not receive a penny in compensation, nor was Sorrell’s mainland trip promoting IPSA reimbursed.

But the pride of accomplishment will never diminish for those directly involved. Yes, surfing has come light years from when our Club founder, Alexander Hume Ford, for the first time “saw men and boys standing upright on waves.”

Is it not appropriate Outrigger DNA (where the sports of old Hawaii shall always have a home) rode the crest of professional surfing?

Members previously acknowledged were also joined by Smirnoff judges Johnny McMahon and Neil Ifversen (representing Peru). Even our iconic bartender Anzai was in the mix with his concoction, Smirnoff Surfer.

Don’t leave OCC without one. But-only one.