



First Annual Punta Sayulita Surf Classic- April 17 – 18, 2010

By Roberto “Chuy” Madrigal

Bay Area developers Brett Ellsworth and Kevin Roberts, made a decision to find a more sedate and tranquil place where they could conduct their business and enjoy their lives and families in a different more sedate environment. They opted for Mexico, a place with a warmer climate where there was ample opportunity and where they could still be a relative short flight away from home. After a long and lengthy search to find that place, they finally found it; a home where their families, specially their children could enjoy a peaceful slow paced environment to live in, enjoy themselves, attend a bilingual school and be happy. They soon found themselves living first in Punta Mita near Puerto Vallarta, eventually settling down in Sayulita, Nayarit, a quaint beautiful village that had it all; peace and tranquility and not far from an international airport.

Kevin being an avid surfer found a virtual paradise of waves and close access to relatively unexplored surf territory. He had developed an interest in an old Hawaiian sport with professed roots in South America that is experiencing a revival of sorts and is currently sweeping the entire globe. Accepting the fact that he was no longer a spring chicken, he dove head first or rather feet first into what is quickly becoming the sport of choice of baby boomers and enthusiasts of all ages. He found SUP more commonly known as Stand Up Paddle – Surfing. This sport not only provides an excellent all around work out but one that allows one to surf and catch waves, but much easier and there were no problems standing up fast to surf because you were already standing. As Steve Pezman of Surfer’s Journal once told me, when we were talking about getting older “Well we know that we can surf Chuy, its just the getting up that gets a little harder.” So SUP certainly provided a solution to that problem for those of us who are moving on in our lives and for those that want to shorten the learning curve of “learning” to surf even though it has its own feel.

Kevin and Brett had also been looking for a way to support various green organizations and activities including those of local charities and educational programs that would benefit the overall community. One day after a busy day at the office, Brett and Kevin sat on the porch of their office looking out over Sayulita Beach. They were witnessing another beautiful Sunset and watching some of the hot local surfers out in the warm glassy waves of a new 4 to 5 foot swell that had just hit the coast. They recognized some of the hot local surfers out in the water and noticed that many of them were out using SUP surfboards in the surf and they were tearing it up. There were men and women out having fun, some of them in their forties and fifties, all catching waves and one could distinctly see their wide grins as they rode the waves, at times sharing them all the way to the beach. It was an awesome sight to see and everyone seemed to be having fun.

They looked at each other and they now knew how they could achieve their vision and support all of the community programs that they wanted to help. They had found the promotional vehicle they'd been looking for; a potential way to promote fund raising activities and to support the popular green activities, environmental protection programs in the area including funding for an alternative learning program at the new school in town. That was it; a surfing charity event that would benefit everyone and the entire community could get involved in raising funds and enjoy the festivities. This would not only be a noble undertaking, it would also be a lot of fun for everyone. Although their business backgrounds were not as event promoters rather as real estate developers, they soon found themselves fully immersed in the project and involved even their own staff because in a sense, it would also benefit their own activities and that of local businesses as well; although it was a gamble it had all the potential to be a win-win situation for all, including Mother Nature.

Build it and they will come? It was like the little locomotive that could and both Brett and Kevin's expectations were that at best, they would receive a modest interest in what they considered a fun surf event in their quaint beautiful beach community of Sayulita. There were no prize monies, no pomp and flare and not much budget to put it all together. But they awakened and gave the community a common purpose with a message that everyone could understand and support. What happened soon after sure surprised the heck out of Brett and Kevin and all those that had had their doubts initially. The surfing brotherhood pipeline soon got wind of this event and a few calls here and there from supporting friends and the calls started pouring in. The Aloha spirit was in full swing. At first there had not been much interest by international or even local media and television coverage but once the ball started rolling, every major media outlet including from the international community was on the beach at what in many ways was now deemed the biggest event to hit the beaches of Nayarit as long as one could remember. There was an impressive international field of professional surfers and plenty of tourists flocking into town. Current SUP World Racing Champion and Big Wave Tour crown contender Ekelu Kalama from Molokai, Hawaii and arch rival Dana Point's Chuck Patterson, also in contention for both crowns, were on the competition roster. The list began to grow and grow, and soon many other world class SUP and mixed discipline professionals, amateurs and Honorary Ambassadors were in town. California's Sacred Craft's producer Scott Bass, Angel Salinas and Coco Nogales from Puerto Escondido, Ventura's Pro Surfing Champion Mary Osborne, Laguna Beach own "Eco Warrior" James Pribram, and up and comers Darren Eudaly and Ikaika Kawai from Maui Hawaii were on the who's who competition roster. The list was complemented by a contingent of local surfers and multi discipline aficionados including local heroes "Tigre" Cadena and three time current Mexican National Long board Champion Patricio "Ticho" Gonzales and Florida ex-pat Ryan Helm, were all in the mix. Now the Inaugural year of the Punta Sayulita Surf Classic had the makings of a true World Surfing Championship Tour Event.

Opening ceremonies were highlighted by the presence of Nayarit Tourism Director Edwin Gonzales and Bahía de Banderas Mayor Hector Paniagua, popular film and TV stars Andrea Legarreta and Eric Rubin along with a host of government dignitaries and celebrities from around the world. An additional highlight at the start of the tournament was a colorful and spiritual blessing of the event ceremony,

performed by an indigenous group of Huichol Indians that clearly made everyone feel the positive spiritual energy present. It was just too much of a timely occurrence to call it a coincidence but as the ceremony came to an end, the swell started to build and the “Classic” was now blessed with great waves to the delight and amazement of all in attendance including the competitors themselves. The “Little locomotive that could” had now become a world class surfing event that rivaled some of the biggest surfing venues of its kind.

The Punta Sayulita Surf Longboard and Stand Up Paddle Classic got quickly under way at the conclusion of the Huichol blessing ceremony. The Competition began with the grueling 10K Open Ocean paddle race to the neighboring village of “San Pancho” (San Francisco), another well known quality surf spot just up the coast from Sayulita. The field of competitors included well known big wave and rip and tear surfers like Coco Nogales and Sayulita Classic organizer “I am not an event promoter”- Kevin Roberts both in their debut as SUP distance racers. Legendary, Chuck, the “smiling iron man” Patterson from Dana Point, California blew away the field of competitors clocking an impressive and now official record time of one hour and twenty minutes. Florida transplant and now official Sayulita local, Ryan Helm, who at one time led the race for a stretch, gave Chuck a run for his money with a heated head to head race, but once Patterson switched on his after burners the race was over and he powered through the finish line well ahead of the pack with Helm coming in second with Dave Collins a close third. A name to keep an eye on, 16 year old Emmy Merrill from San Clemente CA, was the only woman entered with the all male SUP field of racers in the 10k race and in the SUP Surfing division and finished in 8th place with a time of one hour and thirty five minutes, now the official record time in the women’s division. Unfortunately, the long awaited competitive feud for the coveted Championship SUP Distance Racing crown between Ekolu Kalama and Chuck Patterson did not materialize. The 2.2K amateur “Tour of Sayulita” SUP Race was a quick sprint through the course and to the finish. The men’s division was won by Adam Finer from neighboring Bucerias, second place went to Hector Gonzalez from Sayulita and in 3rd Gonzalo Gonzalez also of Sayulita.

The women’s SUP 2.2 K race was won by Kimiko Taguchi of Vancouver, Canada and coming in second place Erin Roberts of Sayulita, Mexico. For the rest; a potpourri mix of participants of all ages and ability levels it was a great fun filled event and after all how can anyone put rules or restrictions on having fun?

The level of competition in the Longboard Division was so fierce and impressive brought on by the local surfers that it surprised the visiting professionals and nearly caught them all off guard. After two full days of embattled back and forth competition, Sayulita local and current Mexican National Longboard champion Patricio “Ticho Gonzales, narrowly squeezed by Toes on The Nose team member Darren Eudaly from Laguna Beach to take the win and become the first Punta Sayulita Surf Classic Longboard champion. After losing in the earlier rounds, Patricio fought a long hard battle through the losers bracket with an dynamic array of maneuvers and power surfing to eventually wind up in the main event and win the contest.

The women’s division provided spectators with an impressive show of feminine grace, nose riding, cutbacks and progressive surfing maneuvers. Mary Osborne, an experienced surf competitor came out on top by putting on an impressive performance accompanied with long graceful nose rides and smooth flowing cutbacks, barely edging out rising longboard star, 15 year old Hallie Rohr, of San Clemente who came in 2nd place followed with an equally impressive performance put on by Michelle Richards of Nova Scotia, Canada in 3rd place.

A co-stellar event and probable main attraction of the Punta Sayulita Surf Classic was the SUP Surfing division. The battle lines were drawn and the list of competitors was as formidable as would be the performances of each competitor. Some of the names in the field represented the cream of the crop in SUP Surfing, Ekolu Kalama, Chuck Patterson, Angel Salinas, Scott Bass, and new to SUP competition

Ikaika Kawai, Fernando Stalla and Ryan Helm. Ekolu Kalama made his charge in the early rounds moving up quickly until he was unfortunately eliminated; not by another competitors but by miscommunication in heat scheduling, but he graciously accepted his elimination and cheered his team mate Ikaika on. Another early casualty of the event was incredibly, Honorary Ambassador, Angel Salinas of who rides SUP boards in the huge gnarly hollow tubes of his native Puerto Escondido. He too was taken out in the early rounds of the event; he had gotten got knocked out by his own board. Luckily in the shallow shore break and had to be taken to the waiting ambulance for observation and treatment. As Angel commented later, "Its hard to believe that I ride Puerto on huge hollow days almost on a daily basis and I come to surf 2-3 foot waves and I get hurt in the mini shore break, I was knocked out cold but remained on my feet and didn't know where I was or what I was doing" guess heading hit on one side of your forehead on your brow by a heavy SUP board can be somewhat an unforgiving experience.

Patterson, Helm, Ikaika, Bass, and newcomer Stalla charged on. When the battle was over, the Crown was Ikaika Kawai's, having come first in each heat he was in; he was the clear victor and deserving Punta Sayulita first reigning champion.

Aside from the exciting competition and the support and goodwill of the event by the crowd and the Honorary Ambassadors, Ekolu Kalama and Ikaika Kawai brought an overwhelming amount of Aloha Spirit to the festivities with them direct from Hawaii that was quickly complemented by the feel good ambiance and overall "Spirit of Aloha" present at the Classic. It was one of the best good vibe happenings I have ever been to personally- no hassles, no bad vibes all good energy everywhere and throughout the entire competition.

Ekolu a renowned talented musician, completely enhanced the good energy and Ohana (family) vibe by his impromptu performances at numerous locations around town and a special performance for the children of the local Costa Verde International School of Sayulita. He was supported Ikaika Kawai, his wing-man, travel companion and team member with his quick witted humor and light hearted demeanor that was greatly enjoyed by the students.

The climax of the festivities besides the good energy that permeated the entire time of the "Classic" was Ekolu's final performance at the Awards Presentation Dinner-Concert that was enhanced by the support of a hot local Reggae-Latin band that completely rocked the place out. The sound of Hawaiian, Reggae and Latin Music filled the air until the wee hours of the night and suddenly it was over. The Punta Sayulita Surf Classic will go down as one of the best feel good events ever and for years to come.

The win allowed Ikaika to join team mate Ekolu Kalama on the SUP World Tour. So now the time had come to leave and it was on to France for the next event in the SUP World Tour and new adventures and exotic places and unfortunately for many, to bid the beautiful town of Sayulita and its warm hospitality farewell until next year.

Punta Sayulita Surf Classic – OFFICIAL RESULTS

Men's Longboard

1st – Patricio “Ticho” Gonzalez – Sayulita, Mexico
2nd - Darren Eudaly - Laguna Beach, California
3rd - Rogelio Ramos - Sayulita, Mexico
4th - Isidro “Chilo” Rodríguez - Sayulita, Mexico

Women's Longboard

1st - Mary Osborne - Ventura, California
2nd - Hallie Rohr – San Clemente, California
3rd - Michelle Richards – Nova Scotia, Canada
4th - Kemi Vermon, Punta Mita, Mexico

Stand Up Paddle-Surfing - Men Open

1st - Ikaika Kawai - Maui, Hawaii
2nd - Ryan Helm - Sayulita, Mexico
3rd - Check Patterson – Dana Point, California
4th - Fernando Stalla – Sayulita, Mexico

SUP Paddle Race – 2.2 K Men

1st - Adam Finer - 20:37 - Bucerias, Mexico
2nd - Hector Gonzalez-- 22:26 - Sayulita, Mexico,
3rd - Gonzalo Gonzalez 23:08 - Sayulita, Mexico

SUP Paddle Race – 2.2 K Women

1st - Kimiko Taguchi - 26:54 - Vancouver, Canada
2nd - Erin Roberts – 28:48 - Sayulita, Mexico,

SUP Open Ocean Paddle Race – 10 K Men

1st - Chuck Patterson - 1:20:34 – Dana Point
2nd - Ryan Helm - 1:23:07 - Sayulita, Mexico,
3rd - Dave Collins- 1:25:06 - Sayulita, Mexico

SUP Paddle Race - 10 K Women

1st - Emily Merrill – 1:35.22 – San Clemente, California

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