

George Freeth—Father of Modern Surfing

By Frank E. Walton

The people who glide swiftly over the waves off Waikiki and the other spots around the islands probably never give a thought as to how their sport started.

It was Hawaii-born George Freeth who was responsible for surfing in the modern style. That is, with the short board and standing up. BF (that is, before Freeth) surfers used boards some 16 feet long and surfed lying down.

Freeth, born in November 1883 in Honolulu of a Hawaiian mother and a British father, commenced surfing at the age of nine. His board was 16 feet long, three inches thick and two feet wide. It is not clear how many nine-year-olds it took to help him maneuver the clumsy slab to the water. But ride the waves he did, belly buster style as was the fashion in those days.

One day around 1900, Freeth saw an ancient Polynesian painting of a surfer riding a board standing up, and he decided to try it. By trial and error and many spills, he developed a technique so that he could do it. But he found the 16-foot-board cumbersome. He cut it in half and the ancient sport took off. Others quickly copied his board and his style and they soon became the major attraction for the tourists at Waikiki.

One of those tourists was business tycoon Henry Huntington, vacationing in Waikiki. He was enchanted with the spectacle of Freeth riding the waves. He envisioned Freeth as just the attraction he needed at his newly developed beach-and-pool resort at Redondo Beach in Southern California.

He hired Freeth as his drawing card, and a great drawing card Freeth was. He put on a surfing exhibition daily. Long before his scheduled appearance, people would crowd around the building housing the magnificent Redondo Plunge (three pools: a baby pool, a diving pool and an Olympic-size main pool) and ask:

“When is the man going to walk on the water?”

In addition to his surfing exhibitions Freeth also gave diving exhibitions, formed a water polo team, gave swimming lessons and acted as official life guard for the city.

One of his most dramatic performance came about 1915, when



George Freeth with his board at Redondo Beach, California in 1908.

a Japanese fishing boat capsized far off shore in heavy seas. Freeth grabbed his surfboard and paddled out to the overturned boat. He managed to gather the entire crew of nine Japanese onto and around his board and land them safely on the beach.

Some suggestions were made that he deserved a Carnegie Medal for his

action. These medals are awarded for heroic deeds performed at the extreme risk of one's own life. However, rules for the award specifically prohibit such awards to persons whose "vocations require them to perform acts such as life guards, policeman, firemen, etc."

So Freeth never received a Carnegie Medal. But he did receive an official letter of recognition from the Japanese Government. Accompanying it was the Japanese Hero Medal, solid gold, three inches in diameter.

Freeth died in San Diego of influenza in 1919. Although his death occurred some four years after the fishing boat episode, the Japanese Government sent nine wreaths of flowers to the funeral.

Now, when our surfers skim the waves at Waikiki or the Banzai Pipeline, they might give a thought to George Freeth, who got Hawaiian surfing off its belly and onto its feet nearly a hundred years ago.

Water Exercise

By Mary Lou Holbrook

At a time when exercise is on the minds of many, if not in their daily routine, it is always surprising to me to learn that so little is known about water exercise. It isn't swimming, nor does one have to be a swimmer as your face is never put into the water.

Basically, we are standing in the water or holding on to the side of the pool. The premise is to utilize the pressure of the water against the body. This is an isometric form of exercise, as water not only supports, it creates resistance.

Many exercises can be done in the water that can't be done on land. Some advantages are that the body doesn't become overheated during exercise and soreness is eliminated. Top physical fitness is not a prerequisite for this type of workout. Anyone can use it to help strengthen the body.

I hope this has given a better understanding of what water exercise is all about. Remember the saying, "If you don't use it you lose it."



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