



HOO MALI MALI

By

RED McQUEEN

Sports Editor Emeritus

All Hail, The Duke!

Duke P. Kahanamoku, Hawaii's greatest athlete and most widely known citizen, is 75 years old today.

The beloved keiki o ka sina will celebrate this milestone of a fabulous life with a luau in his honor at his own Duke Kahanamoku nitery in Waikiki, given by his partner, Kimo McVay.

How delightful it is that the years have worn well on the Duke; that he enjoys excellent health and that his weight is close to that of the lean, 6-2, 188-pound, 22-year-old Hawaiian who roared to universal acclaim by winning the 100 meters in the Olympic Games at Stockholm, Sweden in 1912, in world record time of 1:02.4.

Despite the fact that his achievements in swimming were made more than three - score years ago, the Duke still remains one of the best known sports figures in the world.

Because his grey and silver hair and marvelous physique make him look



Duke

like a duke, he stole the show at a gathering of world sports celebrities at the New York World Fair last year and he still causes crowds to gather wherever he goes.

In recent years, since he recovered from critical brain surgery, Duke has spread his charm and renewed his fame among the younger generation, far and wide, both on the Mainland and in many foreign climes.

We dare say there has never been a finer ambassador of good will.

He Put Us in Business

One of Duke's greatest claims to aquatic distinction was that he was the first man to swim the 100 yards under 60 seconds.

Yes, and we were there to see him do it, not once but a number of times.

This was in the summer of 1911 when he first came into the limelight and started shattering national and world marks in almost every performance in Honolulu Harbor between the Army pier and pier 5A.

The 50 and 100 freestyle were his specialties and when he was repeatedly clocked in 55 2/3 seconds in the century, AAU bigwigs on the Mainland questioned our timing methods.

While they were skeptical, however, they finally accepted it as a record.

Surely there was nothing wrong with local officials and each time Duke appeared in a meet against local, Mainland and Australian stars, the stands were jammed and tickets were at a premium.

This was even after he proved his prowess to the aquatic world by his world-record performance at Stockholm in the summer of 1912.

He continued to shatter world marks as he returned here and performed during World War I years. And here's how he put yours truly, then a freckled-face snotnose, in business.

Every time the Duke broke a record, the fans would go wild. They would rise as one when he took his mark and never sat down until the time was announced.

If it was a record, wham, would go their hats into the harbor. Many fans gave their kelleys the heave ho as soon as they were sure he had won; didn't wait for the time.

Some of these top pieces were costly jobs, of the Sugar Planters' variety. They went into the drink, pheasant leis and all.

Here's where we came in: We were peddling programs at all the meets at the time and after each of Duke's performance, would retrieve these hats from the diving boys or wharf rats for a consideration and peddle them back to the owners at real profit. You were all good for at least a buck while the pheasant lei jobs commanded a bonus.

War Cost Him Olympic Medals

It was unfortunate that World War I forced the canceling of the 1916 Olympic, otherwise Duke would easily have defended his 100-meter title.

When the 1920 Games at Antwerp, Belgium, rolled around, many thought that Duke, at 30, was a bit too old to try out for the U.S. team. But at the behest of the late George (Dad) Center, famed Outrigger coach, Duke whipped back into shape and defended his Olympic crown in the new world record time of 60.4 seconds.

Duke then swam on the winning U.S. 800-relay team with Pua Kealoha, another Islander, and Norman Ross and Perry McGillivray of Chicago.

Duke took one more crack at the Olympics in Paris in 1924 but lost the 100-meter title to Johnny Weissmuller, Bill Bachrach's boy wonder from the Illinois Athletic Club, who had come to reign as the world's fastest swimmer at the time.

Like the long drawn out arguments of the greatest golfer of all time, or the time-worn feud over the greatest fighter, many have tried to compare Duke and Weissmuller.

It can't be done. They came in different eras where they surely would have improved with the trend of time. 'Twas often said that Duke only swam good enough to win and didn't concentrate on breaking records.

We'll say this for the Duke in his prime. There was never a more colorful figure in any form of sport. He exuded color and magnetism.

Yes, Duke is still a household word throughout the world, synonymous with the greatest in swimming, and he'll remain as such ad infinitum.

So let's rise and toast this Great Hawaiian on his 75th birthday and wish him many happy returns of the day.

P.S. A second toast to his sweet wife, Nadine, who has been a sparkling addition to Duke's life.