

# Surf Spray



by Ron Haworth

## **Hemmings takes it all**

The World Surfing Championships gold cup was brought to Hawaii for the first time yesterday by husky Fred Hemmings.

Hemmings, who evidently found the unfamiliar surf of Puerto Rico much to his liking, wrote prior to his biggest win in surf competition:

"Things here are similar to Hawaii—warm water, humid days with afternoon onshore breezes. The best surf has been four feet at a spot called Domes.

"Sorry the surf hasn't been better, but we're all very proud our wahines did do well, and I'm proud to be representing Hawaii and the Outrigger Canoe Club."

Without Hemmings Hawaii would have again looked bad in comparison with Australia who took second, third and fourth in a fine team effort.

## **Tough luck for Downing**

While it's not pleasant to read of any Hawaiian being eliminated from the World Surfing Championships, it is especially disheartening when that individual is George Downing?

And quite naturally, Downing wanted very much to win. But while his value to the Hawaii team was beyond reproach in the water, he also had a value out of the water—perhaps more so than anyone realizes.

He was, in fact, the team coach, a position which carried more responsibility than a mere title. Young surfers like Clyde Aikau and Jimmy Blears, two on the squad, could pick up tips from Downing's vast experiences.

It's hard to talk to Downing without coming away enriched with surf knowledge. His eyes have seen too much; and his memory has retained most of it.

Two years ago the WEC were held in San Diego and Downing went along as coach. It was a first in a sport never before sophisticated enough to warrant even an amateur coach.

The statistics of that contest give no hint as to the drama which surrounded the outcome, and few know the vital part played by Downing in getting a second-place finish for Jock Sutherland an a speck of prestige for Hawaii.

Going into that final day of the three-day competition, Young of Australia had already amassed enough points to win due to some strange scoring rules.

But the next spots were up for grabs. In the running were three "lefties"—Sutherland, Corky Carroll and David Nuuhiwa. Nuuhiwa had led the pack after the first day, but fared very badly the next when he was forced to surf right.

## **Ideal for 'righties'**

The site for that final day was Ocean Beach, again known for its right slide more than a left. The direction a wave peels and offers the best conditions is what makes a particular spot liked by individual surfers.

Goofy-footers are at their best going left where they can face into the wave. The average surfer has his left foot leading and looks away from the wave.

All three in contention for second spot were goofy-footers caught in a unfavorable situation that favored a right slide. And of the three, Sutherland was the best "switch-footer."

Coach Downing knew this. And he also knew that surfers do not win always by ability alone. Many things enter into producing a victory.

Surveying the situation, Downing saw that the left break was uncommonly good, maybe even better than the right. But he also realized that the judging towers had been placed with the right slide in mind.

Under the existing set-up a judge would find it impossible to evaluate a ride to the left. So Downing went to work.

First he used Hawaiian persuasion on the officials to get one tower moved up the beach, and when the labor was not quickly forthcoming, Downing commandeered a work crew from the ranks of spectators.

## **Strategy works**

Then he drew Sutherland aside and pointed out the merit of surfing left, instead of banging heads with already-a-winner Young, who preferred rights.

A later study of the scorecards proved out Downing's wisdom. Sutherland did well, while Carroll and Nuuhiwa flopped.

We'll never know how Sutherland would have fared on the right slides, certainly no better than his second-place finish, and likely not as well.