

Shark-bite surf princess still making waves

Published 16 years ago



Ask AI

By Suzanna Mustacich

Seignosse, France - A bitter wind drives Atlantic rollers onto Europe's longest uninterrupted beach break, but nothing deters these elite women surfers, least of all the remarkable Bethany Hamilton.

The 20-year-old Hawaiian lost her arm to a tiger shark in 2003 but she has battled her way back to the top of her sport and competed this weekend in the Swatch Pro Girl competition on Boudaines beach in southwest France.

Despite the psychological and physical trauma of the near fatal shark attack, in which she lost more than 60 percent of her blood, the teenage Hamilton refused to relinquish her dream of becoming a pro surfer.

"She was a junior surfer at the top of her class at the time and she couldn't imagine not surfing," said Becky  on, her

difficulties to overcome.

"A prosthetic arm won't work because there isn't enough of a residual limb and a prosthetic that she can't move wouldn't help her surf," said her manager.

Physical therapy and strengthening exercises allowed Hamilton to adjust her balance and movements to compensate for her missing arm and avoid causing herself more injuries by overusing her back and remaining arm.

The only concession made to her handicap is a handle on the surfboard, which allows her to duck dive under approaching waves when she paddles out.

Hamilton, who has a handful of sponsors, has proven that she does not need special consideration. In 2009, she was ranked 14th in the World Qualifying Series.

"This year, I want to do even better," said the blond Hawaiian, who was fighting disappointment after being eliminated on Saturday in the heat leading to the quarter-finals.

She lost by a few tenths of a point in the last seconds of her heat as she and fellow competitors fought a powerful current and increasingly violent sea.

Hamilton will need to move into the top ten to earn a coveted spot among the surfers on the World Tour circuit, currently dominated by Stephanie Gilmore, a 22-year-old Australian.

Gilmore, confident and personable with her eye on a fourth World title as she moved into the quarter-finals, has gotten to know Hamilton out on the waves.

"She is amazing," said Gilmore. "She doesn't want anyone to go easy on her. Her core strength must be incredible."

Hamilton's determination in the face of amazing odds makes

"It's always in the back of my mind," she admitted, clearly uncomfortable with the spotlight on her young life, when all she really wants to do is be the best surfer she can be.

Gilmore, considered the woman to beat, is more at ease with her role in a sport that has evolved to champion female athletes and embraced girl culture.

"The young girls look up to us," explained Gilmore. "They say, 'I can be a powerful girl, a powerful woman' and still be feminine."

"Female surfing has come into its own to such an extent that Ripcurl, who sponsors both Hamilton and Gilmore, has a marketing department dedicated to girls, whose shopping prowess accounts for 30 percent of Ripcurl's clothing, accessories and equipment sales.

"The surf girls have an ideal life - surfing, travelling - and they are all pretty," said Julie Pollet, Ripcurl's European girls' media and PR Manager. "We're selling a lifestyle."

Both the popularity of the sport and Hamilton's notoriety can expect another boost.

Hollywood director Sean McNamara has shot and is currently editing a film based on Hamilton's book, "Soul Surfer", with AnnaSophia Robb as Bethany and Dennis Quaid and Helen Hunt as her parents. - AFP

SUNDAY TRIBUNE

A popular KwaZulu-Natal brand, delivering a rich blend of in-depth news

SECTIONS ON SUNDAY TRIBUNE

News
Sport

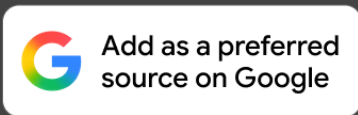


OUR NETWORK

Business Report
Cape Argus
Cape Times

compelling storytelling. For an audience who wants more than headlines, sundaytribune.co.za offers the depth and perspective the weekend deserves.

[Read more](#)



- Isolezwe
- The Mercury
- Pretoria News
- Saturday Star
- Sunday Tribune
- Sunday Independent
- The Star
- Post
- Weekend Argus

