

W H E N We Were K I N G S

THE WORLD CHAMPIONS OF THE 1980S AND THEIR MOMENTS OF GREATNESS

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Plenty of people reading this page weren't born when the eighties came and went. For these kids, the eighties aren't a time but a recycled cultural phenomenon: synth pop and blinding colour. To hear the tales of that era recited by misty-eyed Gen Xers is as grating as listening to a baby boomer getting all fond and superior about the sixties. Music was not inherently better in either era. In fact, the vast bulk of it was rubbish.

But without the clingy sentiment, a case can be made for the eighties as the crucible of modern surfing. It was a decade dominated by Australians: of the six world champs in the 80s, four were from our shores and one had long been considered an honorary Aussie. Even behind the Australians who went all the way, there was a horde of genuine contenders pushing them to the limit: Cheyne Horan, Simon Anderson, Pam Burridge, Glen Winton, Dave MacAulay, Gary Elkerton, Richard Cram, and the prodigy who'd seemingly burnt out ahead of his time, Mark Occhilupo.

In those ten years, the world champions were transformed from men of obscure legend, noble and broke, to Nietzschean supermen: professional athletes with money, profile and power. In the white hot intensity of the new tour, the thruster was born and ironically, the surfer/shaper died. The great brands rose in the public consciousness: not just the Big Three evolving from homespun beginnings into global forces, but the innovative, comet-streak

upstarts like Gotcha, Instinct, Mango, Mambo and more. With the rise of the video cassette recorder, surf cinema faded almost to extinction, as grommets hooted from the couch at *The Performers*, *Filthy Habits*, *Mad Wax* and *North Shore*.

The tour thrived on the idea of personal feuds between these athletes. Sometimes, they delivered on the hype. One of the champs

interviewed for this story recalls getting menacing phone calls from another's manager throughout the long night before a critical heat, until he rang his own manager in desperation and the two agents beat the tripe out of each other. None of this was orchestrated for publicity, or even acknowledged in the daylight.

The overall effect of this mass culture saturation in surfing was to disembodify the world champs – to mark them out in hyper-colour caricature to such an extent that they no longer resembled fellow surfers but had become Wrestlemania-style heroes and villains. The perception was they were raking it in, living Hollywood lifestyles on the beach. And to an extent there was truth in the image. But just

as much of it was amateurish and comically disorganised. And behind the superhero imagery, these were real people trying to chip a career out of difficult material. Being named the world champion of anything is likely to mess with your sense of identity.

Listening to these six men now, each of them in differing ways recalls feeling surprised by their success, despite chasing it so deliberately. Each seems to have wondered who they were going to be the day after they were crowned. Each has found a sense of purpose in being a parent. It's striking that each of them took such a long-range view of the quest. Not one of them refers to the concept of natural talent, presumably because everyone around

them was talented, too. Their titles were built on the things that happen in the months and years beforehand – training, planning, attention to equipment, scrutiny of opponents... calling to mind something Muhammad Ali said many years ago. "The fight is won or lost far away from witnesses – behind the lines, in the gym, and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights."



MARK RICHARDS

1980 • 1981 • 1982

MARK RICHARDS WAS A LEADING LIGHT IN COMPETITIVE SURFING BY THE TIME HE WON THE FIRST OF HIS FOUR CONSECUTIVE TITLES IN 1979. HIS CONSTANT PREOCCUPATION WITH DESIGN KEPT HIM AHEAD OF THE GAME AS THRUSTERS AND THE NEW WAVE SWEEPED SURFING INTO THE 80S. MARK'S NOW 54, AND STILL RUNS THE SURF STORE IN NEWCASTLE THAT BEARS THE FAMILY NAME, A DIRECT DESCENDANT OF HIS FATHER RAY'S BOLD HYBRID: THE WORLD'S ONLY CAR DEALERSHIP AND SURF SHOP.

Then

It doesn't matter at what point you start competing, there's always older guys you're trying to beat. And later, there's younger guys trying to do that to you: in my case it was the two Toms. It's survival of the fittest. So I didn't think about it.

I competed selectively - I chose to surf Australia, because it was home; Hawaii because I liked going there, and Japan because I had a sponsorship deal there for my boards. In 79 and 80, those three legs probably only made up about two thirds of the tour. My pro surfing career was a bit of an accident. I wanted to be a surfboard shaper. When I left school, I just surfed comps so I could travel and surf with really good surfers.

I didn't feel any pressure in 79 because I wasn't trying to win the title. 1980 was different: I set out from the beginning to win the world title because no-one had ever won it twice at that stage, and it was never really close. I didn't have an obvious rival that year. For the third and fourth titles, in 1981 and 82, Cheyne and I had a constant battle. The lead was changing all the time and the Title would be decided by whoever did the best in Hawaii. It was a bit like that year when Fanning and Parko were the only two who could win going into Hawaii. Cheyne and I never talked to each other all through that time. We probably resented each other. We get on fine now: I surfed in Bali recently in a legends event with Cheyne, Potts and Jake Paterson. Back then I just saw him as a competitor I wanted to beat. He was in the way.

Competition in those days was a completely different mindset. We were passionate about trying to win. There were no big sponsor dollars like there are now and we depended on the money we won. The era captured people's imaginations because it was real. Later, there was less pressure to win the contest dollar, and a certain competitor seemed to have everyone

convinced it was ok to come second. It seemed like a lot of the top guys were more interested in playing guitars and singing songs round campfires. There was no rivalry, no passion. Andy Irons changed all that. He was maybe the most honest pro surfer we've seen. He wore his heart on his sleeve. He never said, "Oh well, the best man won." You know that scene in *Blue Horizon* when he's on the back of a ski and he's just lost a heat and some journalist asks him "Hey Andy, how do you feel?", and he responds "HOW DO YOU FUCKING THINK I FEEL?" That's passion, that's honesty. I feel guilty that I wasn't more honest back then.

The only responsibility I felt was from a media point of view in Australia. I did TV and radio interviews where I was always being asked, "Aren't surfers a bunch of drug addicts and dole bludgers?" I felt a strong responsibility to change that perception. The sport was on tenterhooks - it could've gone either way and I wasn't taking it for granted that companies were throwing money at us to surf.

I was still living at home above the shop on Hunter St Newcastle through those years of being world champ. I'd come home, shape some boards, then get back on the tour again. I always knew I'd end up back shaping after it was all over. That was my chosen career path. You couldn't make enough money pro surfing in those days, to never have to work again.

My back had always been an issue, throughout my career - it's a long story, but I have a weird curve in my spine. Overuse of my back just limits my mobility. The way you had to surf in the 80s... the rotation, twisting... I could no longer put in the time in the water. I can't remember how it affected me but I guess I was really pissed off at the time. It was just a matter of doing the best we could.

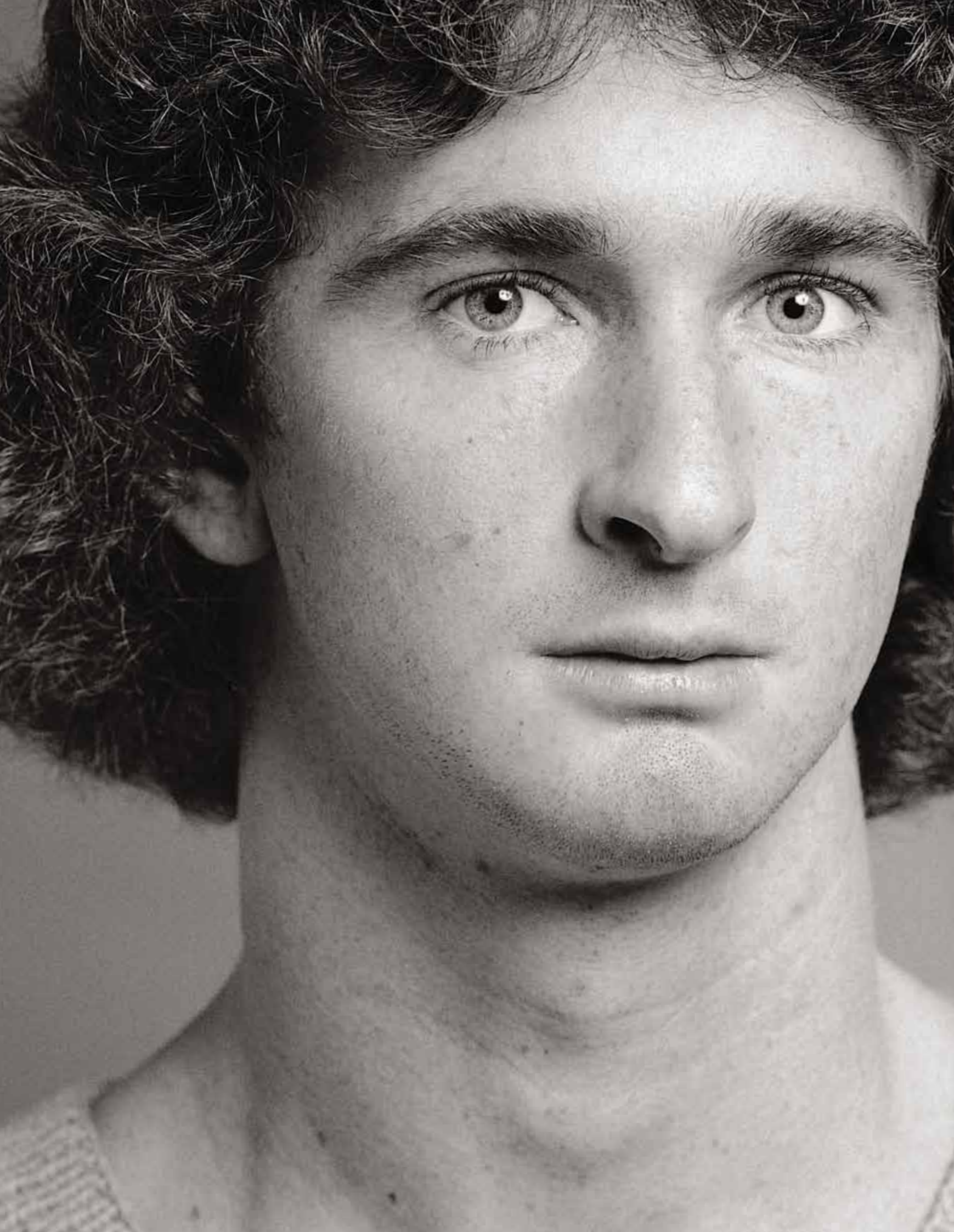
I was still living at home above the shop on Hunter St Newcastle through those years of being world champ.

Now

I think sometimes my prominence has been an issue for my family. I'm married to Jen, and we have three children; Kyle, Grace and Nathan. Kyle surfs but he's not a competitive person and I think he doesn't like the way things are in the water with crowds and aggro. He's into stand-up paddling, and so is Grace, my daughter. Nathan's the youngest at 17. He surfs in the local club contest but doesn't care if he gets out of his heat or not. I went to the video shop a while back, and they'd introduced this policy where you had to have your card or you couldn't borrow a film. It's a ten minute trip in there, and I realised halfway that I didn't have the card - I never carry a wallet. I thought I'd try to wing it, but the girl wasn't having any of it. It's the one time in my life I've given in to temptation and said, "Do you know who I

am?" She didn't know or care a bit who I was. I've never tried it again.

I was a ruthless competitor, just win at all costs. Now, I'm in my 50s and I have a family and a business. My priorities and responsibilities have changed, and all that stuff doesn't seem to matter anymore. I don't have reflective moments at all. I don't dwell on it. I'm too busy with my family, my work and squeezing in a surf. It's something that happened in another life. You can't live in the past - you've got to look forward, and in the scheme of things, (the titles) aren't as important as people think they are. It's not a cure for cancer. It's not feeding starving kids. It's just surfing. It was an amazing time and I was really fortunate to be a part of it, but the things I remember are the waves and the friends and the places I went. That's what is memorable.





TOM CARROLL

1983 • 1984

DURING A CAREER THAT KICKED OFF IN THE LATE 70S AND APPEARS TO BE FAR FROM FINISHED, TC DOMINATED THE HIGHEST TIERS OF WORLD SURFING. PERSONAL HARDSHIPS AND HIS PRINCIPLED STANCE AGAINST APARTHEID PROBABLY COST HIM EVEN MORE ACCLAIM, BUT HE REMAINS AMONG THE MOST RECOGNISED AND RESPECTED SURFERS IN HISTORY. TOM STILL LIVES IN SYDNEY AND RIDES FOR QUIKSILVER.

Then

At first in 83, it was just about doing as many events as I could. Then it clicked – I could be world champion! Before then, I couldn't even see it. Injury forced me to train. Other people were interested in me succeeding, like the manager I took on, Peter Manstead. He was a controversial character, and it became a difficult relationship between he and I. But he opened doors within me. We were both looking at breaking ground together.

The rivalries changed with time: Curren shocked me, he jolted me, and he was a lot younger than I was. Five years, when you're 19, 20, is a long time. Occy and Pottz were coming on – I needed to hurry up and come up with whatever I had. I saw them as major obstacles: they were young and talented and vibrant. And there were also the old school, the guys who were my heroes like MR and Shaun. I was close to Pottz. We travelled a lot together. He took on Manstead as well, and went down the same path with him. Pottz found it hard to get grounded in his life. His family wasn't as stable as mine. I had a home space. He came and hung out; it was a good place for him to be – my friends befriended him. He came and lived with us for a while, and we shared the same manager. When I decide to boycott the South African leg in 85 he was openly supportive, which meant a lot. I felt safe with him.

With Curren, it was friendly, but brutal in the water. He had a really good rhythm with the ocean. We didn't carry the competitiveness on land. It wasn't my aim, and I'm really glad of that.

I was disciplined and restrained – I stayed in the top 5 for nine straight

years, and got two titles in there. I surprised myself by how disciplined I could be – although there was another side of me... a lot of craziness around me at the time. That was an era when personas weren't really marketed to the public – it's much slicker now, how brands portray their athletes. We were just the way we were: quite raw. And remember, you have issues when you're young – everyone does. It was fucken confusing being amongst it all. BL and Dooma were more calculated though. They were hardcore competitors – you could see them carrying it, just walking around. It was hard competing against them. I'm not a naturally competitive guy.

I won four of the last six events in 85. I can remember the presentation of that first title was very cool because my father was there. It was at the Sheraton in Sydney. It's all a blur now, but I've got a photo somewhere of me holding the trophy in a red bow tie and a red cummerbund – arrgh! The presentation night for the second one was a bit wilder. I think Hawkey might've been there. When I boycotted South Africa, Bob Hawke supported me. I think it worked for him politically because there were youth votes in it. He invited me to Canberra, offered me legal help – he was fantastic. My sponsor, Instinct, were South African, and they got an injunction against me over it.

It was necessary for me to be very selfish and single minded over those two years, to get the best out of myself. But the tools I developed to do that weren't necessarily good for being a father, being in business, engaging with the rest of the world. As world champion, I just orbited outside all that stuff. But you can get yourself stuck in some dark, smelly holes with that worldview...

We were just the way we were: quite raw.

Now

The groove I'm in these days is being with my family. I've got 19 year old Jenna, 17 year old Mimi and 8 year old Grace. I'm much more available to those people I care about now. To my surprise, I'm still living off surfing professionally. I'm doing the big wave stuff with RCJ and working with Quiksilver in all those different capacities. It's just blown up for me – I didn't know this was going to happen.

It's crazy when I think of how much time's passed. My view of the world's slower now, wiser I hope. I've bumped my head enough times. I'd been in a great place as world champ, then I went through a trough in my life, and I'm in a great place again. I've had a handful of good people guide me through, my brother being one of them. It's ongoing – it doesn't stop.

I share a lot more with Barton now than I used to, especially over the last ten years or so. He's not the bloke I thought he was back then, but those

things don't go away altogether – they just kind of... get put in a room. It feels like Barton's opened up. And he's intelligent – I like talking to him. I'm grateful I had the opportunity to make a stand about a few things during my career. The South African boycott was weird because I didn't think it would be such a big deal, all the attention. Did it cost me the title in 85? There's a pretty good chance it did. But injury was a big factor too – I'd won the first two events, then I did an ankle.

My daughter's got a saying up on her wall – she does ballet, which is no easy thing – and it says "whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger". That cuts to the chase. I had injuries over the years, and I had personal tragedies and troubles, but you can work through adversity. Right now, my knee's an issue – it's the old one from when I was 16 – the doc says it's twice my age – it's 100! It'll need replacing, but there's no point doing it until I'm finished surfing at this level.



T O M C U R R E N

1 9 8 5 • 1 9 8 6

IN 1985 AND 86, TOM CURREN WAS THE EPITOME OF SHORTBOARD STYLE. ARGUABLY, HE STILL IS. HIS EFFORTLESS, TECHNICALLY PERFECT SURFING WAS NEAREST ONLY TO SHAUN TOMSON AMONG HIS PREDECESSORS. BUT HE WAS UTTERLY UNLIKE HIS PEERS, BOTH IN THE WATER AND OUT OF IT. HIS SERENE INDIFFERENCE TO THE HYPE AROUND HIM CONCEALED A CONSIDERABLE COMPETITIVE DRIVE: HE WAS THE ONLY AMERICAN TO TAKE THE CROWN IN THE 80S, AND HE DID IT TWICE, USHERING IN THE NEW DECADE WITH A THIRD WIN IN 1990. TODAY, CURREN LIVES WITH HIS FAMILY IN SANTA BARBARA, MAKES MUSIC AND CONTINUES TO RIDE FOR RIP CURL.

Then

I was young, but I'd been on the circuit for three or four years when I took that first title. It was tough, a lot of week to week schedules, for the big events, a lot of rubbish conditions, strange times. I remember the OP Pro riot in 86 - I'd left the beach just before it. It was very disappointing to have that happen at home. It wasn't as shocking for me as it would've been for the people down there who experienced it directly. I remember Ian Cairns saying it put pro surfing back ten years. I loved being able to do it in 1985: training hard before that first title, finding I'd improved a lot and that the training was worth it. That was a career peak for me. I'd get nervous before big heats, then I'd work through it, try to focus. When it was time to surf, you had to put in 110%, push really hard. I'd be worrying about my boards not working, not knowing the wave... but you just have to get on with it. The Merricks were really working for me at that stage: I had a whole lot of high standard boards, but in particular, I had Black Beauty that everyone knows about, and another board that was a wide 6'3", like a really nice summer beach break board. The duel with Occy was absolutely personal: it was as big a deal for me as it was for those watching. He was going so strong then; he seemed to be so

focussed. You had to really surf perfectly to have a shot at it. I managed to catch up to the level he was surfing at, and I was maybe just a little more consistent. The thing is, I learned a lot from him: we got along really well. Aside from Occy, I was close to Al Merrick, but not really anyone else. I had no real travelling partners. I grew up not knowing much about the Aussie culture, but a lot of my favourite surfers were amongst them. I love the Australian enthusiasm, the competitiveness, the whole rivalry thing between the Aussies and us... By the time I won the second title in 86, the tour was becoming a bit repetitive I guess. The surfing part was fine. But going to some new place, getting a hotel and all that... it got boring after a while, like, hey, you're in a box. The publicity stuff was okay - there was just a lot of it. I came across as quiet and introspective in the media, I know. Sometimes I think what happens to me (laughing) is I think of the right thing to say right after the conversation's over. Sometimes I felt lost among the hype, you know - the colours, the money, the egos... I tried to fall back on how good my life was, my friends and family. I did like winning, and I liked the attention. But mostly, it was just the surfing: there wasn't anything about that lifestyle that was better than the surfing itself.

The duel with Occy was absolutely personal.

Now

I'm still making a living with Rip Curl, doing the Search trips. I'm able to make the mortgage payments through that involvement - they've been a really good support. I'm gonna have to adapt into more of the corporate side, I hope. I can't be a team rider forever. I love surfing in a different way now, not having that pressure to always be at the top level. It was really nice to go to Indo recently, so perfect. I'd been there (the Mentawais) as early as 94 and 95. I'm mostly travelling still - the season here (Santa Barbara)'s pretty short, so you have to travel. Sometimes the music's more important to me than the surfing, and then it'll change over and when it goes flat I get into it more again. I get other

musoes in - it's really neat having a studio at home: I can play all the instruments at home, but sometimes I get to play with some really good players, which is very rewarding. Looking back at those titles, I feel proud I got to be a part of it, but everything keeps moving. The thing is, you work really hard to do something, and you'll be happy for a while - you think you're killing it, but then someone else is on top. I'm proud of what my kids are achieving in surfing. My daughter's doing well in France, and my son's also very competitive. But as a parent, you want them to see other things, other than just surfing.

DAMIEN HARDMAN

1987

RENOWNED FOR HIS BACKHAND TECHNIQUE AND STRATEGIC SMARTS, NARRABEEN'S DAMIEN HARDMAN RETURNED THE CROWN TO AUSTRALIA AFTER CURREN'S BACK-TO-BACK WINS IN 85 AND 86. IN THE PROCESS, HE TOOK DOWN A HOST OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN THE SPORT. TODAY, HE'S A CONTEST DIRECTOR AND RETAILER, STILL CLOSELY ALIGNED WITH HIS ORIGINAL SPONSOR RIP CURL.

Then

The year I got second to Barton, I competed in 24 of the 28 events – it was literally every second week. You were never home – it was great fun. I was 21: I finished school at 18 and went straight on the tour. It was a chance to see the world and surf great waves, although more often than not the waves were crap. But I got to do all the Search trips.

The first few years on tour I travelled quite a lot with Barton. He took me under his wing. Barton had a driver's licence too, so there was someone to get me from the airport to the contest. We were both sponsored by Aloha, and we were good mates. I never had an entourage. I had a pretty bad back most of the time, and I can specifically remember wishing I could pay a masseuse to follow me round the world. We were earning okay money, but there was no way I could afford hangers on.

1987 was the year the tour changed so that it ended up in Australia. The middle of the year was okay I guess, but somehow, coming into the Australian leg, I was sitting third or fourth in the world rankings. It didn't occur to me until after Christmas when people were saying, "You could win this thing."

So I trained like crazy for the first time in my life. I worked on my boards, and between the training and the boards, I reckon I was surfing 30-40% better. I won Bells, and the rest is history. The conditions at Bells were very changeable, as they always are. But back then there was no waiting period, and no ability to take the event mobile down to Johanna. In the early rounds it got pretty big, then it was small for the finals. I surfed the final against Tommy Carroll in good, clean little three to four foot Rincon. Tom was my hero, and I'd only surfed against him once before. I felt very much like the underdog. The waves were these mechanical three-wave sets,

and we barely saw each other during the heat, just went wave for wave, riding at the same time. There were hundreds of people lining the cliffs, and we were both surfing really well. That might've been the only goofy vs goofy final at Rincon ever held.

When I got the win there, it set the platform for the other Australian events. I became favourite for the title overnight. It came down to one heat in the Coke Classic at Manly. Mathematically, TC, Curren, Elko, Barton and I could all have won the title at the start of that event. It was a war of attrition: it came down to the last man standing – we were spread across the draw so we didn't encounter each other until late in the contest. I didn't meet Elko until the semis. It was ridiculous – we had to sleep on it overnight before that semi, knowing that the next day we'd surf a heat for the World Title.

I remember the whole night. I couldn't sleep. You try not to think about it but you just can't stop. The next day I was so pumped – I felt like I deserved to win it. The fitness, the boards... I couldn't have done anything more to help myself.

It went right down to the wire – at the end, Elko just needed a six or seven, and it was all his. He could've won the World Title on the last wave of the heat. But the siren went, and they announced that I'd won the title. There were about 20,000 people on the beach, and I reckon about 15,000 of them were from Narrabeen. They just went crazy.

I went on to beat Barton in the final and took out the event that day too. The other great thing about that day was that my manager, Greg Day, was getting married that afternoon. I guess he didn't plan it all that well: he only had two clients and the other one was Wendy Botha: she won the women's World Title that day!

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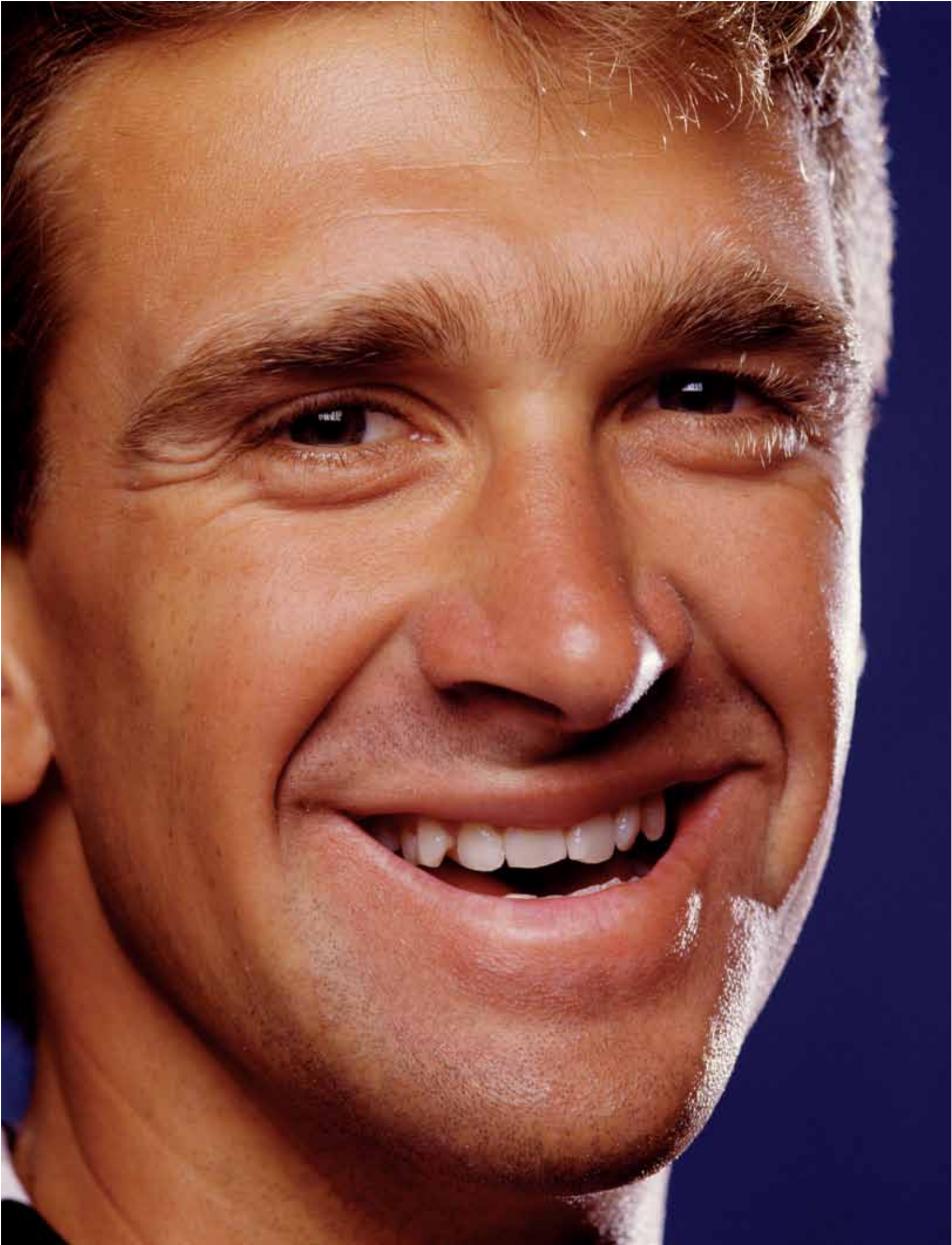
Now

I'm probably not that dissimilar to the guy I was in 1987. I still live in Narrabeen. My kids are 17, 16 and 9. I'm still married to the same girl who travelled on the tour with me back then, my childhood sweetheart.

I'm really grateful for what I had at that time. When you're in the bubble on tour, travelling the world, getting good money for going surfing, I don't think many people appreciate it. But now I think I do appreciate it more.

I still get a buzz out of getting up at 5:30 and going surfing, just like I did on the tour. I competed because I loved surfing, not for any other reason. In one sense the title did provide all I hoped it would for me personally. But on another level, it's just a title. I never expected myself or the world to change if I became world champion. I don't think it elevated me, although people do treat you differently, because most people assume it's a bigger thing than it actually is. In the end, you're still just a surfer.





BARTON LYNCH

1988

BL TOOK OUT THE WORLD TITLE IN 1988, FINISHING THE YEAR WITH A WIN IN TEN FOOT PIPE OVER HEAVILY BACKED RIVALS TOMMY CARROLL AND DOOMA HARDMAN. NOW, HE RUNS THE SURFERS GROUP, A CONSULTANCY OFFERING EVERYTHING FROM COACHING TO MANAGEMENT AND TV PRODUCTION, AND CO-ORDINATES BL'S BLAST OFF, A JUNIOR COMP IN ITS SIXTH YEAR.

Then

I was 24, turning 25 that year. Over the years I'd travelled with mates like Dooma and Glen Rawlings, or alone, sometimes with other surfers from my sponsors team. But I've always done my own thing; I had no 'posse' mostly I was travelling solo. I didn't go on tour to make friends or to be popular. I was out there to win. When I look back at myself as a competitor, I think I was pretty self-sufficient. At times I've had coaches and managers but never toured with them. There were cliques and groups on tour, and Australian surfers were dominating what was said and done. Elko, Occy, Potts, Tommy Carroll, they were the aggressive, crazy wildman characters, they had big personalities and were living it. It was who they were, not a put-on but it wasn't me as a person and I wasn't going to compete in marketing terms with those guys. In the generation before us Rabbit, Shaun Tomson and MR were articulate ambassadors and spokesmen for profesional surfing and I thought – 'that's how I can fit in. I became a surfers representative on the ASP board and a spokesman for the sport – this was in part a conscious marketing effort to make myself necessary. I deliberately assumed that role. In 87 I came out firing, going into Europe I was well ahead on points, and then I crumbled. There were things that affected my competing but

basically I didn't handle the pressure of leading. The last event was at Manly, my home. I thought it was my destiny to win it in front of my home crowd, my family, and it didn't happen. I finished third. So coming into the next year, I didn't even think about the title, I just went out and surfed, I was still dwelling on the previous years loss. Everyone thought Tom would win, but as it played out at Pipe, he scored an interference and was out. I went on to win the event and realised that my destiny was even better than I had imagined - I was more than happy to have lost that title at Manly in exchange for winning at Pipe. People were surprised at how I came out and won in big Pipe in '88 but what they didn't know was that I'd been surfing Pipe every day of the winter for many years leading up to that final, I knew the wave well and loved it. I was so focused back then on being a success, on making every moment, every second count and I'd worked out how to play the game. Today, I don't think there's many surfers playing the game to its full potential. It's not only about your surfing! You need a concept – the idea of the Cooly Kids, Andy as Kelly's nemesis, the “thinking mans surfer” whatever it is. Being a pro surfer, going out in a heat against the guys who were your heroes, who were up on your bedroom wall – that was sick!

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Now

After I retired I didn't go to an ASP event or look at a surfing magazine for about ten years, I got as far away from it as I possibly could. For fifteen years, I was never in the same place for more than three months. It's so de-stabilising. You can't have too many attachments living that lifestyle. You're never in your own environment and you had to adapt. When you finish the tour, you don't know who you are. It's such a whirlwind. One day when I finally settled in to home I looked through some old mags, I had to see who I was back when I started. Did I really say those things? Was I really that bloke I thought I was? I was happy to find that I was the kid I remembered. I've always understood how unique the lifestyle was. Even when I was really young, I'd be hitchhiking from Mosman to Manly for a surf and I'd

see the traffic going the opposite way up the Spit Hill to the city and it'd make me so bloody happy that I was going the other way – I still love this freedom and have tried to build a life that allows me that. These days I spend a lot of my time coaching surfers of all ages and particularly enjoy helping young kids achieve their dreams. If my experience can help fast track their development then Im stoked. I really enjoy being at home, working at my life and doing the simple things, just living. Surfing is most probably more fun too, I do it because I want to not because I have to, I do it for enjoyment and to stay healthy, I love it again. The great thing about now, getting older, being a husband and a parent, is that you have learnt so much, and now I know that I don't need the accolades to be fulfilled. I'm more me now than I've ever been. I'm just another ant on the face of the planet and I am really happy to just be!



MARTIN POTTZ

1989

BEFORE HE TOOK OUT THE LAST TITLE OF THE 80S, SOUTH AFRICAN/BRITISH/AUSTRALIAN POTTZ WAS RENOWNED AS A FREESURFER AND PIONEERING AERIALIST, SEEN AS THE EPITOME OF AGGRESSION AND POWER. HE'D SCREAMED INTO STARDOM AT 16 ON A HUGE SECOND REEF BOMB IN THE PIPE MASTERS. DESPITE HIS FREAKISH GIFTS, OPINION HAD IT THAT HE WASN'T A CONTEST MACHINE. IN THE END, HE WON IN 89 BY THE WIDEST MARGIN IN HISTORY. TODAY, HE'S HEAVILY IN DEMAND AS A CONTEST COMMENTATOR AND TV PERSONALITY.

Then

It was difficult, reining in my aggressive tendencies to mount a World Title campaign. At that stage the aerial assault wasn't really the way to go. Conservative surfing was more the order of the day. So I took a big risk in surfing the way I did to make that happen. But that was the way I surfed and I wasn't prepared to change it. Twenty-eight events that went down that year. I surfed in about 75% of them, and racked up seven victories. The highlights for me were the three in a row at the beginning of that year. In 89, the momentum was different. I was way more disciplined that year than previously. I did more training, had my boards under control. I was in it to win it. Although people talk about Peter Colbert's influence, I did more training with Tom Carroll than anyone else. We really fired each other up, and he showed me the way more than anyone. I started the year with a win at the Cold Water Classic and from then on the ball was in my court. My nearest rivals were Derek Ho and Dave Macauley, but that only came to be apparent at the back end of the year, when it was already pretty much over. My relationships with the other guys on the tour that year were best described as love/hate! You have to understand we weren't getting paid a lot of money, so we all had to fight to win. It was dog eat dog, cut-throat stuff. We were all fighting to survive. I'm aware that I came across in the surf media as sublimely confident -

confidence was a big part of winning that year. Finally I believed in myself. Looking back, there's a fine line though between confident and cocky! I was presented with the World Title after the second round of the Pipe Masters in Hawaii. Once I'd made it through that heat, they made an announcement that I'd officially won the World Title. I then had to wait a week or so till the ASP Banquet in Waikiki. Barton Lynch had to hand me the trophy - I took great pleasure in that, considering we didn't get along back then (we're the greatest of mates now though). The whole thing was a bit of blur, it all happened so fast. I do remember looking at the trophy and thinking to myself, "is this it?" At that stage I had been travelling on tour, full time, since I was 15. So I didn't feel homeless. I was at home, whether on tour, or on the Northern Beaches with Tom Carroll and the Newport Crew. My home was the world at that stage, I enjoyed everywhere I was, and I had enough good mates around me all the time. I was 24 years old, and there were pictures of the green and yellow board everywhere. There was a music video I did that was part of the video *Strange Desires*; the Pottz clothing and surfboard label... I enjoyed every minute of it. It had taken me ten years to get there, so I lapped it up. Who wouldn't? I've got no regrets. Sacrifice equals reward, and I was a good person until you had me in the heat. Then I was an asshole!

Barton Lynch had to hand me the trophy - I took great pleasure in that.

Now

These days, I live in paradise. Beautiful waves, empty beaches, down-to-earth people. I've settled down with my beautiful wife Katie, our nine year old twins Jack and Bella and my 17 year old daughter Maddy. I'm happy! Surfing's gone full circle for me. I feel like a grommet again - I'm lucky enough to travel the world with the best surfers, enjoying the best waves, then I come home and surf my brains out! After all this time, the first thing I still do every morning is check the wind... then I make my wife a cup of tea. There's no place like home.

I love being involved with pro surfing. I'm passionate about giving back to the sport, and the guys on tour these days. The ASP is doing an amazing job at putting on incredible events, and ensuring today's surfers have a viable career. I hope all these guys realise how damn lucky they are. There are so many guys out there I admire: Tom Carroll always, Kelly without a doubt, and I've got huge respect for Mick, Joel and TB. I don't know if I was surprised or amazed at what I pulled off (winning the World Title). I didn't initially feel the impact. It took time to sink in, and there are still days even now that it blows me away. ▀