

best foot forward

Longboard wizard Lucas Proudfoot is catching all the right waves – right around the world. *Deadly Vibe* hangs ten with a fulla we can all be proud of.

To go from having a world ranking of 117 to 17 in under a year is no small feat. Especially when any ranking at all is dependent upon getting yourself overseas to some of the hairiest surfing spots known to man. Then again, longboarder Lucas Proudfoot is not your average surfer (and he doesn't have small feet either).

A Bundjalung/South Sea Islander man from Cabarita, 20km south of the Queensland border, Lucas has had saltwater in his veins ever since he followed his father and uncles into the surf at Lennox Head as a five year old. Now 22, and with only two years of overseas competition under his belt, he's well and truly established himself as a force to be reckoned with.

Taking part in this year's Oxbow World Longboard Championships, Lucas delivered a strong performance at a warm-up event in Spain to come fifth. When competition got underway in Portugal, Brazil and at the legendary Jeffreys Bay in South Africa, his strong technique and flair for style got him through to the third round and his current ranking.

"I'm really stoked, as this was my first year competing in the World Championships," says Lucas. "On the strength of my performance I've been invited to the 3rd Annual Bear Hawaiian Pro Longboard Invitational. Hawaii's a whole different story – it's the Mecca of

The Perfect Surname For Surfing?

"A lot of people think Proudfoot is an Aboriginal or Native American name, but it's actually Scottish. It's kind of a cool name for a surfer, I suppose. When I was in South Africa at the Championships, the organisers were saying to me, 'Can you please friggin' win coz it's like the perfect name!'"

Photography: Jason Loucas

surfing and I've always wanted to go there."

Paul Holmes of The Bear Partnership is excited about Lucas making his debut at what is regarded as the ultimate testing ground for surfers everywhere. "Lucas was an essential invitee," he says. "He has the style, he rides with more than grace, he has real power in his turns and he's no slouch on the nose, either!"

Lucas puts his incredible rise of late down to focus and training. "Swimming is the key with surfing because you're in the water paddling the whole time. I also do a lot of sprint training, running, boxing, circuit training, skipping, push-ups and chin-ups – basically

"Lucas Proudfoot is one of those individuals you meet who immediately make an impact on you. He's widely respected by the sporting community and the Australian Sports Commission for his sporting prowess, his ability to communicate to all levels of business and as a very popular ambassador for Australians and surfing in general. He can also do a mean form of nightclub table-top dancing and has one of the funniest wits known to mankind!" - Jason Blewitt, Operations Manager, Surfing Australia

anything that helps with strength and explosive speed. You don't really need to do endurance training because you're only riding a wave for a minute at the most."

Some financial assistance has also come in handy. Along with his little brother Ben, also a keen longboarder, Lucas has been the recipient of a scholarship from the Australian Sports Commission's Indigenous Sports Program, which he regards as the perfect stepping stone.

"I knew that if I could get a decent result overseas I'd have more to play with in terms of sponsorship next year," he reasons. "I'd been given this chance from the Australian Sports Commission, so it was up to me to see if I could do it. I kicked off with goods results in Spain and the water just kept rolling. Mind you, I'm still learning. I don't mind getting knocked out if I know I've done my best – I don't stamp my foot and peg my board!"

National manager of the Indigenous Sports Program, Glen Brennan, says Lucas and Ben are fantastic young people who have worked hard and deserve everything they get. "It's nice to find people competing at such an elite level who are still so grounded in their own community and their own identity. Even though they trip all over the world, they never forget who they are or where they come from."

The longboard is surfing's old school. Also known as a malibu, the nine-foot board is more flexible than its little brother and, thanks to modern design methods, can be made up to suit just about any rider or condition.

Lucas rode shortboards until four years ago when he found that his heavier build was better suited to a malibu. Now he rides a Munro board courtesy of the Byron Bay manufacturer that also shapes for 2000 world champion Beau Young.

"I weigh about 95kg, so a longboard is easier for me to surf on,"

he says. "In competition, longboard is judged 50 per cent on traditional manoeuvres like walking the board, riding the nose, hanging five and hanging ten, and 50 per cent on performance, which is more about surfing it like a shortboard. Longboards are great – you can do a big floater, a cutback, a really nice barrel, then walk up and hang over the nose!"

When he's not surfing at Cabarita, Black Rock, Pottsville or any of his other favourite spots, Lucas plays the didj and dances with the Minjungbal Aboriginal Dance Group at Fleays Wildlife Park in Burleigh, and participates in a mentors program at Tweed Heads High School.



That Ain't No Dolphin!
"Once I was surfing with a mate, coming in on a wave, and he started pointing at something. I looked down and there was this hammerhead coming along the gutter! I surfed right past the stupid thing thinking, 'I'm not falling off me board now!'"

"The Indigenous Sports Program has provided about 30 of us sportspeople with training to go out and mentor some of the younger fullas. We help them get a resume together, motivate them to do positive things for themselves, and try to improve their self-confidence and communication skills."

Lucas hopes to see more young fullas taking to the waves in the future. At the recent Queensland Indigenous Sports Awards, he was thrilled to learn that there is now Aboriginal representation in all manner of sports other than the usual – footy and boxing – including netball and ballroom dancing.

"It's good to see more people getting into surfing too," he says. "I think the tide's really turned in the last year or so. Of course there's the Slabb family, who've really focused on building up the Indigenous surfing events. And there are some real young ones about too, like this little blackfulla who lives down the road. He's only 11 or 12 and I don't even know his name, but give him five years and he's going to be huge!"

The future's looking bright for Lucas too. Now boasting sponsorship from French sportswear giant Oxbow, he's planning to compete at all the major international longboarding events in 2002 and improve on that already enviable ranking. But that's only the half of it. As guitarist and vocalist with up-and-coming rockers Max Judo, it looks like there might be a CD in the pipeline too (the band recently recorded a demo in Sydney). "Once I'm out of the water, I like to do other things!" he laughs. "Hopefully we can get some airplay soon."

However, don't think for a minute that Lucas isn't serious about his surfing. He might have broad interests, but he knows what his number one priority is. "My aim is to be world champion someday, but realistically that takes time. You've got to do your apprenticeship first, like learning how to perform on cue in unfamiliar environments – and learning how to sleep for a day and a half in an airport!"

Lucas Proudfoot would like to thank his mum and dad for all the support they have shown him over the years.

Photography: Jane Lewis