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“THE MAYOR OF TEAHUPO’O” AND THE KING OF SURFING:

Two ultimately distinct personalities and the science of waves come to the giant screen...

Most surfers and many general sports enthusiasts recognize nine-time Association of Surfing Professionals (ASP) world champion Kelly Slater as the world’s greatest surfer – a king whose legendary wave riding feats are unparalleled. Few of these would recognize the name of the man affectionately known as the “Mayor of Teahupo’o” – a tiny island village on the north side of Tahiti that fronts one of the world’s most treacherous surfing waves. Raimana Van Bastolaer carries on the traditions of Tahiti’s watermen and in his own quiet way earns the respect of Kelly Slater and others lured to Teahupo’o and its notorious reef break. That anonymity is about to change as *The Ultimate Wave Tahiti*, the latest IMAX® film by veteran Canadian director Stephen Low comes to global screens in February 2010. It is Van Bastolaer that serves as host to contemporary surfing’s royalty and to a global audience perhaps unfamiliar with wave science.

The film is about people and their relationship to each other and the ocean. The interaction between man and ocean is largely governed by shoreline activities – be they recreational or commercial. Few venture into the true deep. Even the most ardent surfer or sailor practices their art within sight of land and it is here the story takes place. The story of what is a wave, how is a wave formed, and for what purpose and benefit is told with cultural flair by Van Bastolaer as he and Slater interact with the sea and those around it.

“It was great making this film with my friends. We had the free space at Teahupo’o on multiple trips to film it. Raimana is one of my favorite friends. He is truly one of the most generous people who is always giving his time. The best thing about the filming was that it was not a far stretch from just a bunch of regular days of surfing to capture the amazing shots,” says Slater.

Located at the northeast end of Tahiti’s main island, Teahupo’o was indeed overlooked by all but the natives and a few adventurers. It took the advent of modern surfing and surf technologies and the quest for more extreme waves to bring Teahupo’o out from the depths of Tahitian history and into the glare of the cameras. The debut of the first recorded photograph of a surfer locked in Teahupo’o’s embrace rocked newsstands and sent the world’s best watermen straight to the travel agent.

And when they came, Van Bastolaer was there to greet them – making sure they understood the culture that is every bit as important to Teahupo’o as the wave itself.

“We are by nature a hospitable people. It is important that anyone coming to our community be cared for and that they understand why we are here and why this wave is important to Tahiti and to the outside world. It’s my unofficial job to tell the wave’s story and I was honored to help Stephen Low and his team capture the legend of the wave,” said Van Bastolaer.

When Magellan undertook his first crossing of the Pacific with five ships in 1520, Van Bastolaer’s ancestors had already furrowed the deep ocean in their rafts, double canoes and outriggers. In reality, the civilization of Polynesia was essentially maritime—a civilization of adventurous, widely dispersed mariners intrinsically familiar with the ocean and its waves.

There is a distinction between men of the sea – some are navigators and some are mariners. The navigator knows where he is going – the mariner is lured by inquisitiveness and courage. Tahitians are a unique blend of both. In fact, the language of Tahiti is peppered with seagoing references; the word migration for example *eke* can be translated as to “go with the wind.”

Van Bastolaer's people were in Tahiti when de Bouganville came ashore and after his ten day visit named the paired Tahitian islands "New Cythera" the Greek island of mythology where the love goddess Aphrodite emerged from the sea foam. Today, Kelly Slater and modern watermen come to Teahupo'o to enter and be immersed in its legendary foam, born of the surf that Teahupo'o's reef flings skyward with a violence and beauty, all its own.

When the great navigator Captain Cook arrived in Matavai Bay in 1769 he was at the end of a fourteen month passage that saw him record in the log his arrival - "the land appeared as uneven as a piece of crumbled paper." That Cook made no mention of the sea is understandable following so long a voyage; but his admiration for the Polynesian mariner was profound. Tupaia, a Tahitian priest and navigator, accompanied Cook on his remaining voyage and it is possible no success would have occurred without his participation.

By comparison, Slater and Van Bastolaer could not be more different. Yet, in the water they are kindred spirits. Raimana's ease of wave mastery, ocean swimming and reef comfort are the hallmarks of genetics and a life close to this tiny spot of coastline. His clear gaze is as precise above the sea surface as it is below; his powerful paddling and confident swimming strokes belie physical prowess and stamina demanded by big water.

"Our reef and the surf line are as changeable as Tahitian weather. One day the surf is the size of buildings and rushes on shore faster than a boat at full speed. Then it becomes calm and peaceful. This is way of the ocean and of the waves that bring us fish, weather and inspiration for our music and traditions," Van Bastolaer said.

Positioned as it is on the borderline of the roaring forties, the Tahitian archipelago is the first impact zone for the swells born in frigid Antarctic waters and blown thousands of miles toward the equator and beyond. As the wind pushes, the water changes and wave size and structure are created and cadence established. Melded with currents and the vagaries of the ocean floor, this seaborne traffic arrives in Tahiti before traveling onwards across the Pacific. It is no surprise that surfing's roots took early hold in Tahitian waters.

“Tahitian culture is one with the sea. It is our duty to preserve that culture and to share it with others – from surfers to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientists and others who study our ocean,” Van Bastolaer continued.

Today, satellite-based technologies, floating ocean buoys and other monitoring systems, ships at sea and centuries of science combine to explain and predict the science of ocean waves. This sophisticated intelligence is the film’s platform; yet, as alluring as the science may be – the ancient Tahitian explanations of where waves come from are every bit as important to surfers like Slater and his host, “The Mayor of Teahupo’o” – Raimana Van Bastolaer.

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