

Beckmann Beckoned

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Having been born in Camp Pendleton and reared in Hawaii, it is no surprise that Travis Beckmann, who's lived in Montauk since 2001, became a surfer.

"I'm the first and only surfer in my family," the wiry, affable 27-year-old said in answer to a question Saturday morning at Gordon Trotter and Mike Delalio's MuvStrong fitness studio off Springs-Fireplace Road, where, for the past two and a half months, he has worked out three times a week in preparation for a hoped-for return to the world tour.

"Surfing's the number-one pastime in Hawaii," Beckmann continued. "Here, kids aspire to become baseball or basketball players. There, everyone wants to become a professional surfer."

He began, he said, at the age of 3, under the watchful eye of Waikiki beach lifeguards, whom his mother, a career Marine, "and a great swimmer," knew. "It was natural because I was in the water so much. I was 100-percent focused from an early age."

He began competing at age 7, and, aside from a recent "three-plus year hiatus," has never stopped.

"I was in the top five on the world junior tour for three or four years in a row. I represented the U.S. in the world junior championships in Australia in 2009 . . . but then it became more of a political thing: You have to make money to spend money, and sponsorship to cover your costs — surfing's an expensive sport — can be difficult to obtain. You're always on the edge, not having that full backing can drain you. You're trying to get by in hopes that you'll make a little more."

"Kind of like going out on the pro golf tour?"

"Yeah, like that. I had many opportunities, but was never able to make a full-season's push. . . . You have to be in terrific shape and have a big chunk of change if you want to live out of a suitcase around the world."

He would, he said, like to give it one more try, and toward that end he'll go to Chile in August for a qualifying series competition in that country's northernmost city, Arica.

"My goal there," he said, "will be to knock off the rust, to get the butterflies going again, to regain the sensation I've basically had from the age of 8 to 23. [The Maui and Sons Arica World Star Tour] will be kind of a jump-off for me. You've got to get your feet wet somewhere."

"We'll be wearing wetsuits there. The wave itself breaks over a slab, a slab of reef — a very fast, very critical wave, usually lasting less than four seconds, no more than five seconds. It's all about criticality. You've got to make it look good."

Asked about the waves elsewhere, he said, "Australia has everything and anything. If you're a surfer and have the



In Chile, he'll get the butterflies going again.

Mike Verricker

time, Australia is a good place to visit, whether you're a novice or an expert. California's the same — very similar to Australia, tons of waves to choose from. Hawaii is powerful, broad, and big. It's the Mount Everest of surfing — where you hope to do your best."

Though sponsorless at the moment, the support of a good family, an awesome girlfriend, and his own resources were sufficient, he said, in persuading him to take one more plunge.

Asked when surfers peaked, Beckmann said, "In football it's 33. In surfing I would say it's longer. You'd see older guys doing it in the '70s and '80s. The kids were kids then. Though nowadays 10-year-old kids are surfing a thousand times better than they used to. Things are changing completely. From the older guard the sport has shifted to the younger guard when it comes to qualifying. But you still see a lot of older ones too, over-30s having a lot of success. You've got to stay in shape, stay flexible, and stay healthy."

"That alone," he said with a smile, "is a full-time job in a sense."

Returning to competition at this stage would require, in effect, that he balance reality with his dreams . . . maintaining the happiness that he has achieved in his life here while giving himself over at times to the single-mindedness that high-level competition demands.

As in professional tennis, professional surfing rankings hinged, Beckmann said, on points accumulated — points defended and points lost if not defended. "You always have to be on the top of your game. The goal is not just to be good, but to maintain a consistently high level. There's a contest every other weekend throughout the world, pretty much throughout the year. By the end of the calendar year you want to be in the top 12 of the Qualifying Series. That will put you into the World Championship Tour. . . . Most of the higher-rated contests, known as 10,000s, are in California, Brazil, Australia, and, of course, number-one, in Hawaii. Besides a world title, a Triple Crown title is probably the next best thing for a surfer."

Though he might possibly accumulate enough points to take part in Vans Triple Crown on Oahu this November, he was, Beckmann said, "really shooting for the 2016 season. I'm looking two years ahead. When you take time off, as I did, you're basically starting from zero."

Asked when he'd begun to think of returning to the circuit, he said, "About six months ago my brain slowly began planting the seed. I felt a kind of . . . antsiness. I mean, you can't just sit around at 27, when you're in the best shape of your life, and knowing you will be until you hit 31 or 32, and not want to get your foot back in the door. You know you're strong, you know you can move well, you know that's what you're good at. . . ."

"Realistically, if all goes according to plan, I'd love to be surfing professionally for the next 10 to 15 years of my life. I've had that goal ever since I was a kid. I never wanted to leave the competitive state, but reality intervened."

As for injuries, he laughed. "I've been stabbed in my jugular by the nose of my surfboard, I scraped half of my face off on the bottom of a reef, I've had herniated disks, blown out my knee . . . it's endless."

Which was why, he added, that his work at MuvStrong had been so important. "Essentially, you want everything — your left side, your right side — to be even, to be balanced. You don't want one part of your body working harder than the next. That's when you run the risk of injury. I've been working here on endurance, stamina, flexibility, and balance."

Recently, Beckmann and four of his surfer friends, acting as Clean Water Couriers for Jon Rose's nonprofit, California-based organization, Waves for Water, supplied 60 families in Salina Cruz, Mexico — "almost in Guatemala" — with small gravity-fed D.I.Y. (do-it-yourself) water filtration systems that "filter out 99.9 percent of bacteria or any waterborne diseases from freshwater sources . . . from rain, lakes, ponds, puddles. . . ."

"Six hundred people have access to clean water now who didn't before. It's great doing what you love to do and getting a chance at the same time to help people along the way."



Recently, Travis Beckmann and four surfer friends supplied D.I.Y. gravity-fed water filtration systems to 60 families in Salina Cruz, Mexico, on behalf of the California-based nonprofit Waves on Water. *Ben Potter*

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