

How Organized School Surfing Started **Chapter 1**

The Complete Surfing Guide for Coaches - Bruce "Snake" Gabrielson

The Origin of College Surfing Programs

(Compiled from manuscript by Bruce Gabrielson and Chuck Linnen for the International Surfing Museum in Huntington Beach, California, October, 1990)

It has been 22+ years since these events took place, and neither Chuck nor Bruce feels they can relate all of the details of how intercollegiate surfing started, especially from the perspective of other schools in the first conference. Hopefully, one of the other members of the founding council will someday be able to add more to what is provided here.

California State University Long Beach, Long Beach State in those days, had its first exposure to organized college level surfing at an intramural surf contest in the spring of 1966. Chuck Linnen, being a widely recognized surfer at that time, was a recreation major at the school and was asked to run the meet. About 80 contestants turn out to surf, Bruce Gabrielson among them and everyone seemed very positive about the event.



*Chuck Linnen and Bruce
Gabrielson*

Bruce had become president of South Sea Surf Club around that time, and had known Chuck since about 1963 or 1964. Both had a strong interest in organizing surfing as a college sport, so they decided shortly after this meet to put together a club type team for the school. Chuck was to be the captain and Bruce was basically his helper and co-captain. They did some advertising in the school paper and told a few friends, and then held a fun meet that year against UCLA at the Santa Anna River Jetty. At that time, the River Jetty had a nice shaped reef like break, and was a popular site for contests.

The next fall (1966), Chuck and Bruce attended a meeting of several Colleges and Universities in Southern California with the purpose of forming a competition league for college surfing clubs. The meeting was held at the lifeguard headquarters in Mission Bay, near San Diego, and was chaired by Russ Calish of the Univ. of Cal. Los Angeles. In addition to Chuck and Bruce representing Long Beach, the Univ. of Southern Cal., UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, San Fernando Valley State College, UC San Diego and San Diego State were represented and well as some individuals from junior colleges. Among those surfers attending they can remember included Greg Pollock, Tuzo Jerger, and Glen Kennedy. Prior to the organizational meeting a contest for some of the schools that wanted to be involved was held at Wind and Sea.

The new league was called the Western Inter-Collegiate Surfing Council. At the time the league formed, Long Beach was already beginning to compete against clubs and other colleges with teams of 6, 8 and 12 man teams. Most teams were made up of six competition members. Matches consisted of three heats with four surfers in each. The WISC initially required 12 man teams with six heats of four.

With the official founding of the WISC, each school was mandated to establish their teams and have them ready to compete as soon as a schedule could be finalized for spring.

Long Beach didn't really have a first time tryout, but used results from the intramural event, plus brought in some widely known surfers who were on campus to put the team together. Some of those on Long Beach State's first team were Chuck Linnen, Bruce Gabrielson, Chris Bredesen, Dave Caldwell, John Geyer, Raul Duarte, and Dale Struble. Dale had placed in the U.S. Championships the previous summer, and, along with John Geyer and Chris were Long Beach's top performers.

Surfing did not have a great image and was not well accepted by the school's administration at first. However, since Bruce was a former student council officer and also a letterman in wrestling at the time, he was able to get some respect and official backing for the team from both the athletic department and the student council.

After considerable lobbying by Bruce for formal recognition of surfing, the school athletic department finally agreed that if the team could compete successfully as an official surf club for a few years, then it would be in a strong position to become a fully accepted sport at Long Beach. Basically, the group was told to first organize the team (and the league), and then, if successful, they would be recognized. The Long Beach sailing club was in a similar situation at the time.

Surfing did not have even club status from the school initially, so Bruce submitted the proper forms to the Associated Student Council and obtained official recognition in the spring of 1967. The student council, like the athletic department, needed a little arm twisting, but surfing was finally recognized as a formal school club.

Members did not receive course credit for competing on the surf team, as they did in regular team sports. Long Beach State did offer a coed surfing class in the fall of 1968 or spring of 1969, so PE credit was formally available for surfing. This worked out well for some team members since there were a number of students enrolled with long boards that were complete beginners.

While team members did get good grades, some classes were often more trouble than fun to attend, mostly because students were required to sometimes surf the beach break in Seal Beach. Members added to the team in fall of 1966 included Gary Diss and Richard Dietz.

In the fall of 1967, Chuck was in graduate school and didn't have much extra time, so Bruce became the president and captain of the surf club when competitions started the following spring. The team format also changed that year to 8 surfers on the competition team. After the first formal tryouts, which were held at Huntington Beach Cliffs, Mike Wilson, Larry Moore, Bob Elder, Steve Hullibarger, and Greg Bond were added to the team. John and Raul had left, Criss was still on the team, but Dale Struble had graduated along with Chuck and were no longer eligible to compete.

The new team had an interesting mix of area surfers. Bruce represented the downtown Huntington Beach surfers; Mike, who was the team's top surfer, represented the Seal Beach surfers; Greg and Larry were more the Los Alamitos and Bolsa Chica area surfers, while Richard and Gary represented the inland surfing community. Criss was a member of the South Bay surfing crowd. Gary, Mike, and Bruce were also members of Huntington Beach Surfing Association.



The only notable league match Bruce can remember that year was the meet at Campus Point in Santa Barbara. The team left Friday afternoon, and met the UCSB surf team members that night. Their team members took the Long Beach team to some parties on campus, and three members ended up getting stuck in the women's dorm after lockout. They had to

jump out of a second floor window into a patch of rose bushes, and all three were scrapped up pretty badly. Needless to say, the team didn't do well the next day and Santa Barbara won the meet. During the late 60s and 1970s era, club competitions were also a big event, so Long Beach's team was able to set up competitions against local clubs for off- season competitions. Long Beach won three major club/team overall meet competitions in 1970, one in Carlsbad, one in Huntington Beach, and one in Laguna Beach. There were also several dual meet competitions against other clubs. Figure 1.1 shows an award won by Bruce at a meet between HBSA and Long Beach in April 1970.

In the spring of 1971, Larry Moore took over as president of the surf club. Bruce was still on campus part time in graduate school, and often attended practices and helped when he could. Both Chuck and Bruce helped judge team matches for the next couple of years.

The Establishment of High School Surfing

Many newspaper articles and documents to support this history exist, have been supplied by this author, and are on file in the International Surf Museum archives. For those historians who

wish to examine the sport in more detail, additional information can be obtained directly from Bruce in Chesapeake Beach, Maryland.

In the fall of 1970, Bruce contacted Edison High School in Huntington Beach about performing classroom observations on-campus for the requirements of his secondary teaching credential. Not only was Bruce interested in course-work for a teaching credential at Cal-State Long Beach, but in the back of his mind he was also thinking about the future of organized surfing.

At that time he had just finished his final season as president and coach of Cal State Long Beach's Surfing Team, and felt that for surfing to gain full recognition at the college level, high schools must be able to support college programs. Therefore, his initial plan was to try and set up a surfing league in the high schools similar to what had been done in the colleges. It's interesting that even though Bruce's initial motive was to help college recognition, once he got involved in high school recognition, college programs didn't even enter into his planning.

Bruce had personally contacted the head of the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) that spring with a formal proposal for a surfing league, and was assured that if a high school competition league could be established, with each school recognizing surfing as a sport, surfing would be sponsored for full CIF recognition. This was similar to the previous college conditions, make it happen and it would be accepted.

Bruce approached Edison's school principal about allowing Edison students to participate in a surfing club, and was given approval to set up the program the same day. Since he was also an established surfer in the area, he knew surfers at all the local high schools and also throughout the county. A few other high schools in Orange and San Diego County were interested in putting together a formal surfing program, and through surfers in these areas, he was able to host an informal Orange County surfing championships that first season. San Clemente High School's surf club won that first championship event in the spring of 1971.

Only one school in the Huntington Beach High School District had a club team allowed to compete for that first event, Edison. Marina did not establish a surf club until the

Edison Surfers Breeze to County Championship

Edison High School will represent Orange County in the Southern California surfing championships at San Diego May 13 following its conquest of the second annual Orange County Invitational Saturday at the Santa Ana Jetty.

Coach Bruce Gabrielson's Edison contingent swept to five heat victories in six attempts in outclassing the competition.

Thus Edison succeeds San Clemente as Orange County Champion.

The winners compiled 35 points to runnerup Corona del Mar (24), followed by San Clemente and Estancia with 20 each, Mission Viejo (17), and Marina (9).

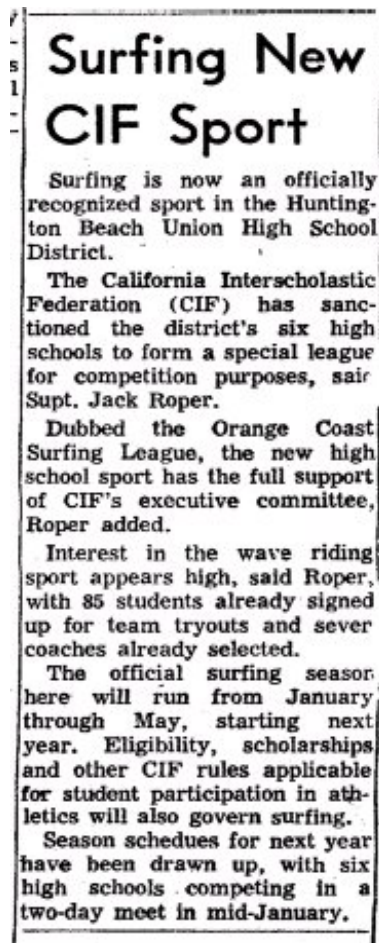
The Edison crew consisted a David Van Druff, Bob Grims, Gary Wurster, Gary Platt, Dan Rice and Des Whelan.

Meet director Gary Gibson says Edison has an excellent shot at the Southern California title, especially if the team has a reasonable familiarity with the San Diego site.

"Van Druff could be the No. 1 surfer at the meet. In fact, Edison has four excellent surfers. The only question is how familiar they might be with the type of waves in San Diego," says Gibson.

Gibson called it a complete victory for Edison: "They had the best surfers, were the best organized and the best coached."

following fall, 1971. Huntington Beach High School students also put together an unrecognized club the next spring (1972), headed by a student named John Davis. John was a popular surfer sponsored by Greek Surfboards, and was also a member of Huntington Beach Surfing Association. Through HBSA, Edison and Huntington Beach held a fun meet at Bolsa Chica State Beach towards the end of the school year in the spring of 1972.



Through the fall of 1971 and spring of 1972, Bruce was able to develop a solid surf team at Edison HS by setting up contests with other local clubs and schools. The idea of formal high school surf clubs got an added push when Edison won the second, and much more organized, Orange County Invitational High School Championships. The meet was a big media event held at the Santa Ana River Jetty, and as the winners, Edison represented Orange County at the first Southern California High School Championship, which was held in San Diego. The newspaper clipping of Figure 1.2 describes this event.

In the fall of 1972, Bruce signed up for student teaching a class at Huntington Beach High School, and basically took over and formalized Huntington's surfing club. By then he was a member of the U.S. Surfboard Championships Board of Directors, plus was still HBSA President, so had quite a bit of local community recognition and support. To surfing's advantage, Huntington Beach High School's administration was completely behind a formal surfing program, and was also aware that Bruce was pushing for formal athletic recognition of the sport.

About that time, through his friendship with Mr. Len Ewers, a Director in the Huntington Beach High School District, Bruce was able to get the school district itself behind a formal surfing program. After a series of letters to each of the district's high schools, a meeting was held to set up a surfing league with all the high schools in the district sponsoring clubs.

This was the first complete high school district to establish a formal competition program in the United States.

Since Bruce was not a full time teacher in the school system, he could not run for the first chairmanship of the council. However, he had finally met his first objective for CIF sponsorship, organized district level competition. In return, CIF's executive committee sanctioned the league as a special league for competition purposes. The newspaper clipping (Figure 1.3) is from the Orange County Daily Pilot describing this historical event. Bruce was awarded the certificate shown in Figure 1.4 by the HB High School District for his organizational support in the league's establishment.

During the 1972/1973 school year, a single event took place at Huntington Beach High School which probably had more influence than any other factor in formally recognizing surfing as an athletic sport at that school. Jeff Smith, a senior at Huntington, won the United States Surfboard Championships in juniors, and was subsequently awarded the Huntington Beach Company's Perpetual Trophy as the years-outstanding surfer in the school district. This was a big media event for the school, and even resulted in a school celebration for Jeff. The picture (Figure 1.5) is a clipping of Jeff receiving his award at a June 15, 1973 ceremony.



TOP SURFER—Jeff Smith, center, was awarded the Huntington Beach Co. perpetual trophy as this year's outstanding surfer in Huntington Beach Union High School District. Surfers from six regional

(Register photo)
high schools competed. Flanking him are Bruce Gabrielson, left, district surfing coach, and Jack Wallace, assistant to the vice president, Huntington Beach Co.

Unfortunately, Jeff was graduating and would not be able to receive an athletic award from Huntington Beach High School for surfing, but this local exposure and recognition was enough to convince the school athletic department to accept surfing as a regular sport like each of the other recognized sports for the following year. Bruce was given full coaching status at the school, on an equal basis with each of the other varsity sports.

About the fall of 1973, four plus years after starting the process for recognition, Bruce held tryouts for Huntington's first varsity surf team. Surfing was officially a spring sport, but in those days the team surfed year around. The stars of Huntington's first varsity team were Tony DeNuccio and Greg Clemmons. There were also several other tremendous surfers on that team and subsequent teams who went on to establish themselves in the sport. Rick Fugnetti and Rick Bauer were among those. The team picture (Figure 1.6), which has also been presented to the International Surf Museum, is a picture of Huntington's first varsity surf team, taken on the beach after a contest in San Diego. This was the first officially recognized and sanctioned high school varsity surfing team in the United States.



The First Officially Recognized and Sanctioned High School Varsity Surfing Team in the United States

Huntington Beach High School, CA

In the spring of 1974, after another successful competition season, Bruce spoke about his part in the process by which surfing had finally evolved into a recognized sport at Huntington High School's varsity awards banquet. Only a few of the parents, school coaches, and students present were fully aware that history was being made at that banquet, but those who did, recognized its significance to the surfing world. Huntington Beach Union High School District, and in particular Huntington Beach High School, had finally formally recognized surfing as a real sport with a real place in athletic competition. When Bruce presented Greg Clemmons his

varsity award, he noted that Huntington Beach High School had thus become the first high school in the US to award varsity letters in the sport of surfing.

After the banquet as Bruce was leaving, Rick Bauer's father came up to him and said "I don't know where this will lead, but I am proud my son was a part of it". That was basically how Bruce felt as well. He had achieved the objective he had worked so long to accomplish, and was thinking that it was now time to move on. He had let his own competition surfing edge suffer during the years when he was working for either college or high school surfing recognition, and was now ready to step aside for others to carry the load.

There was a tremendous amount of momentum for the program by then, and even a certain amount of jockeying among various coaches for district support. Organized high school surfing had firmly established its place as a true athletic event.

As a final note, the original Sunset League formed the basis of what eventually grew into the National Scholastic Surfing Association a few years later. Additionally, the coach who took over the Edison HS Surf Club when I moved on to Huntington, John Rothrick, was the founder of the NSSA.