

SANTA CRUZ WAVES

LIVE THE LIFESTYLE

MAGAZINE



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KAINOA “KAI” QUEENAN

SPEAK SOFTLY AND CARRY A SHRED STICK

By LIZA MONROY

It's the quiet ones you have to watch out for. Kainoa Queenan, aka Kai, 12, should know. Watching Kai dominate the lineup one recent Tuesday at Pleasure Point, it's hard to believe the young ripper is, as his coach Andre Gioranelli describes him, “so mellow” and even “shy.” In an Instagram clip from that session, an impressed bystander can be overheard asking Kai's father, “What'd you guys feed him, raw steak?”

Kai's love of the ocean started when he was 6, during Junior Lifeguards. As soon as he started surfing, Kai was obsessed. “I was checking tides, conditions and swell, and then would have to go to soccer practice,” he says. He wanted to quit all other sports, but his parents only let him after realizing the depth of his commitment to surfing.

“We had a kiddo who couldn't *not* surf every day, and so we ended up driving to the closest spot with consistent waves where he could do what he loved,” says his mother, Amy Queenan. “It's been all him.” At 9, Kai received the Hammer Award at state junior guards (all participants, ages 6-16, were eligible) for his “determination, stoked attitude, and always charging in the water.”

The Aptos-based sixth-grader surfs in both the National Scholastic Surfing Association competitions and the Santa Cruz Scholastic Surf League. He loves all of it, but his favorite aspect is that “you get to surf good waves with nobody out.”

Working with Kai has been “a big journey for me as a surf coach and him as a surfer,” Gioranelli says. “He's getting better, developing a mental strength and believing in himself.”

While Kai loves progressing and pushing himself to be the best surfer he can be—through endurance training, breath-holding, running, and attending Santa Cruz Movement classes with coach Gioranelli—he relishes the total experience.

“I love the quiet and calm moments in the ocean,” he says, “but also the thrill and excitement when I catch a good wave.”

PHOTO: @JRESQUE



PHOTO: TYLER FOX

IN HIS OWN WORDS

DOB: Aug. 16, 2008

Age: 12

Home break: Pleasure Point

Stance: Goofy

Sponsors: Xcel Wetsuits, Kalletka Undersea Co., Dakine, Pacific Wave

What's your favorite thing about Santa Cruz besides the surf? The people. They're funny.

If you could take a surf trip to anywhere in the world, where would you go and why? Mentawai Islands because of the awesome waves.

Who is the most underrated surfer in Santa Cruz? Chris "Manzy" Manss. He has explosive speed and a powerful backhand. He surfs a lot like Bobby Martinez.

How do you avoid crowds in the lineup? You don't. You just have to be aggressive.

How do you balance your surf life with academics? That's easy. My parents won't let me surf if I have anything below a B,

so I have to keep my grades up in order to surf. I do homework every day after I surf.

When you're not surfing, we can usually find you ... Cruising with my friends.

What is your favorite piece of advice for beginning surfers? Stick to Capitola or Cowell's. Be respectful and don't get in the way. Etiquette comes first. First person standing up closest to the peak has the wave. If someone is paddling for a wave, don't paddle for it. Don't be in the open face of the wave if there's somebody on that wave. Head to the whitewater and take it on the head. Learn to duck dive with your board and don't let go of it. Surfing every day will help build skill and confidence. Watching and learning from other surfers helps, too.

What boards do you ride? I ride Sharp Eye Surfboards shaped by Marcio Zouvi. I really like the HT2 and Disco Inferno models. I have a couple [of] boards that are special to me. I have a Hewn board, shaped by my English teacher, Sonn Dixon. It's a shortboard that is super fun to ride in small waves. I also have a 5-foot-3-inch Pyzel hanging on my wall. I don't ride that anymore because it's signed by John John Florence.

Favorite book: *Surf For Your Life* by Mick Fanning

Favorite subject in school: Math

Which surfer do you most admire? Adriano de Souza and Italo Ferreira. They both came from almost nothing, and they both won world titles. I respect how hard they had to work.

The most important lesson I've learned is ... If in doubt, go out. 🌀