



MEMORY MARCH: Queenscliff members walk the beach at Kurrawa yesterday in memory of Saxon Bird. Photo Courtesy: Luke Marsden (Sunday Mail).

MY MATE SAXON: A TRUE CHAMPION



ON THE FLY: Saxon Bird (1990-2010)

Queenscliff competitor Tom Atkinson remembers his fallen clubmate Saxon Bird:

Saxon was just a true champion, not only just at surf life saving but in general. He'd walk onto the beach – at branch, state or national level – and get the support and recognition he deserved.

It was just unbelievable what he brought to the sport.

From a club perspective, individually when he raced he was unbeatable; his ability was endless, he could do whatever he wanted.

The thing that the club benefited from most from Saxon was when he was put into a team environment. We used to say if we could get Saxon within two waves, maybe 40-50 metres of the other teams, he could swim down anybody – Ky Hurst, Zane Holmes, Shannon Eckstein.

It was two years ago at Aussies we put him in a long way behind; he was probably 17 at the time, up against some of the best swimmers in the world, and if the race was 10 metres longer he would have had them.

I think that's what Saxon brought to the club and I hope his strength continues with the club.



I used to be at work and he'd give me a call at three in the afternoon wanting to get down in any conditions. He wasn't backing down from anything.

Saxon individually thrived in the conditions we had here this week. He was not out of his league in any way. It was an accident that could not be avoided.

Every afternoon we'd go down to the beach and go on a board or a ski. We'd spend endless hours on the weekends or through the week. There wouldn't be any conditions he couldn't handle.

He is an amazing competitor. It's hard for you guys to understand what he's capable of but he's the best in Australia at what he does.

TRIBUTES

Saxon has been a member of our club since he was eight, so for over 12 years he has been an outstanding competitor, an outstanding team man and an outstanding family man. I guess it's fair to say that our whole club is absolutely shattered by this event. We brought 130 of our members together yesterday afternoon; we offered them counselling, I guess we also offered them group grief and we have come together as a club. We are a family club. Saxon and his family – his sister and his mum and dad – are part of that family and the families that are represented by all of our club are absolutely rock solid in our support of Saxon and absolutely rock solid in support of our club and of each other. Saxon was an Australian champion, he was an under-15 surf champion, he was an under-17 champion, he was a member of our teams, he was a lifesaver relay team member. As his father said yesterday afternoon, he absolutely lived for the sport, lived for the club and lived for what we offered him and what he offered us. We are deeply grieving.

David Piper OAM - President, Queenscliff SLSC

Obviously this is a very, very tough time for all us in surf life saving. We extend our sincere condolences to the Bird family, the Queenscliff club and all of Saxon's friends and family. The incident has profoundly affected so many of the surf lifesavers and the officials, the first aid crews and the rescue crews. From all around Australia we've been overwhelmed by literally hundreds of messages of support coming in by the hour from our colleagues from all around the country. They are all asking for us to pass on their thoughts and best wishes to the Queenscliff club which has been rock solid in supporting the Bird family and its members.

Brett Williamson OAM - CEO, Surf Life Saving Australia

In the way the club and the whole organisation came together around this whole situation, and the way our own people, together with the Queensland police service, the Queensland ambulance service and all the other services performed on Friday was absolutely outstanding and faultless. Everything that was possible was done at that point in time. I convey my very sincere condolences to Saxon's family, to his colleagues, to his club and his mates all around surf life saving, and of course the community he comes from. People are having difficulty coping with the loss of this great young man. He'll be sadly missed.

Ron Rankin AM - President, Surf Life Saving Australia

THOMMO: IN IT FOR LIFE



After 32 continuous seasons at Ocean Beach SLSA, and countless roles at club, state, national and international level, Dave ‘Thommo’ Thompson has been awarded life membership by Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA).

To be considered for life membership, members must have rendered distinguished voluntary service to SLSA that is both sustained and conspicuous. While Thommo may not be conspicuous in stature, his dedication to Surf Life Saving for more than 30 years certainly has been.

Thommo (pictured left) joined Ocean Beach SLSC as a nipper and so began his long and celebrated journey. At the age of 20, Dave commenced his involvement with the Central Coast branch on the Board of Competition, after which time he was appointed to the Branch Council.

1986 marked Dave’s first involvement with SLSA as an Australian delegate for Rescue ’86 and he continued into roles on the Australian Championship Committee for 13 years, Australian Championship Executive and has been National Surf Sports Director since 2003. In 2008 Dave was elected as the ILS Sports Commissioner, a role he will hold until 2012.

Thommo’s pool room has certainly seen some silverware and his ongoing dedication to the organisation was recognised when he was awarded life membership of Ocean Beach SLSC – becoming the youngest ever life member in the club’s history, followed by life membership of the Central Coast branch in 2005 and life membership of SLSNSW in 2005.

Ron Rankin AM, SLSA President said, “There is no denying Dave is an asset to SLSA as an organisation at a club, state, national and international level. His commitment, enthusiasm and knowledge are unequivocally valued throughout surf.

“We are proud to award Dave with life membership; it’s a terrific achievement and he should be tremendously proud.” Along with Dave Thompson’s life membership, SLSA has announced that Kristy Harris, Ian (Rick) Wright OAM, Kristy Munroe and the Maroubra SLSC Double Ski Team (1958/59-1966/67) have been inducted into the Hall of Fame, while Terry Boardman (Queenscliff SLSC) and Bruce Caldwell (South West Rocks SLSC) have been awarded the President’s Medal.



MIGHTY QUINNS: Young WA club Quinns Mindarie won its first medals at the Aussies Open carnival with silver and bronze in the U15 Men’s beach sprint.

IT’S BEEN A GOLD MEDAL EFFORT

They don’t come to the Aussies to win gold medals but the championships wouldn’t happen without them.

The army of workers in all areas of the Kurrawa site has been extra busy in what has been a demanding week for all concerned.

The stars of the show have been the members of the water safety team who have spent long hours in difficult conditions, constantly taking the IRB’s and rescue water craft into the powerful waves.

“What they have done this week has been remarkable,” Surf Life Saving Australia CEO Brett Williamson said.

“The on-water safety crews have gone out again and again in very testing conditions, working long shifts in their dedication to the welfare of the athletes.

“The first aid team has also been very busy, as has the workforce, the car park attendants and many others.

“They all deserve gold medals.”



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DOLPHIN TALES BY ZANE HOLMES

Like everyone else in surf life saving, I was shocked at the accident that saw young Saxon Bird lose his life.

It was a nightmare incident for everyone and I can hardly imagine what his parents and sister are going through right now. My very best wishes are with them.

While every competitor is aware when we compete in demanding surf there is a possibility of accidents, never in your wildest dreams do you imagine something so terrible happening.

One of the reasons we go out to compete when the conditions are tough is because sometimes those are the exact conditions we have to handle when we make a rescue.

Saxon was an outstanding young competitor, especially as a swimmer. He was in the open surf race final at last year’s Aussies and was capable of achieving anything during the next few years.

That potential will now never be fulfilled but as a winner of under-15 and under-17 Aussies surf races his name is in the record books and his memory will live on forever.

WIN A

DOLPHIN

SURF CRAFT.

Name

Surf Club

Email

Phone

Drop the entry form into the Dolphin tent. Winner will be announced on Sunday afternoon, 21 March over beach PA system.

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ON BOARD: Open board relay winners Courtney Hancock, Katie Graham and Bonnie Hancock.



GOLDEN SON: Beach sprint king Tom Nolan with his father and coach Mark.



SWIM STARS: U19 surf race winner Miranda Bell (right), with Terrigal's runners-up Jessica Davis and Lauren Hall.



SMILES ALL ROUND: U17 surf race placegetters from Ocean Grove and Grange celebrate winning Aussies medals.



FLYING FINISH: Kurrawa's Ben Mitchell starts celebrating his U19 sprint win.



SKI SPRINTERS: North Bondi's ski paddlers turned sprinters finished seventh in yesterday's final but were happy to celebrate with family and friends.

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IF THE CAP FITS: Maroochydore's U17 surf teams winners Jean Harris, Martha Kneale, Ellie Meuwissen and Rebecca Pegg celebrate a great victory.



LAURA NOT SHORT ON COURAGE

Queenscliff's Laura Shorter (pictured in action above in pink) has dedicated the successful defence of her Australian open women's beach sprint championship yesterday to the memory of her late club mate Saxon Bird.

Shorter maintained her extraordinary 12-month unbeaten record with a determined dash across the sand, wearing the name of her late club mate and good friend taped to her arm.

"Saxon would have wanted a gold medal so I went out and won this for him," said Shorter, who was cheered on by her Queenscliff team mates. "We were so close and I just had to get in there and do it for him today."

Shorter and her coach Michael Gedz have spent the past 10 months, three times a week, preparing for her title defence. "She's a great girl and we have been through so much together – she so deserves this win, she has done so much work and she and Saxon were very close," said Gedz. "Laura has chalked up 13 wins in what has been a remarkable season."

GOLD: Laura Shorter (Queenscliff) SILVER: Chelsea Maples (Kurrawa) BRONZE: Melissa Howard (Kurrawa)

OPEN MEN

It was a case of "Father Know's Best" as North Cottesloe flyer Tom Nolan streeted a strong field to win his first open Aussies beach sprint gold medal. Nolan, just 20 years of age, has been knocking on the door for the past four years, winning silver in 2007 and 2009 and finishing fourth in 2008, as he attempted the under-19 and opens double in a tiring day.

But yesterday was his day and a great celebration for an amazing father and son combination, with Tom's dad Mark coaching his son since he started as his junior age manager 10 years ago. And Tom and Mark now have something else to share – Aussies gold. Mark won gold himself as a member of the Fremantle Open Beach Relay in 1987 at Scarborough.

GOLD: Tom Nolan (Nth Cottesloe) SILVER: Elliot Marynissen (Collaroy) BRONZE: Dean Scarff (City of Perth).

UNDER-19 WOMEN

Sarah Cook made it a winning double for Cronulla when she won her first ever medal in a helter skelter under-19 women's beach sprint final. "It's absolutely amazing," said Sarah, "to be in the final and now win the gold is something you dream about it." Cook had overcome a painful hamstring injury to take the gold and with coach Greg Mitchell was quick to celebrate the first-ever gold medal for the Wollongong-based University student.

GOLD: Sarah Cook (Cronulla) SILVER: Hayley Wyper (North Burleigh) BRONZE: Montana Ardon (City of Perth).

UNDER-19 MEN

Ben Mitchell's journey to the top of the Aussies podium has been a long hard road with nagging injuries seeing the Kurrawa star sprinter struggling to reach his full potential over the past five years. "Full credit to my coach Ryan Hoffman who has got me to the gold medal this season – finally. It is such a good feeling to finally win the gold," said Mitchell. Mitchell got off to a flyer and with the home crowd behind him showed why he is one of the big improvers in the under-19 ranks with a runaway victory.

GOLD: Ben Mitchell (Kurrawa) SILVER: Kristopher Papadatos (Coogee) BRONZE: Luke Anthony (Portsea).

UNDER-17 WOMEN:

City of Perth's Gabrielle Murphy added gold medal number two to her trophy cabinet in the under-17 beach sprint. The Churchlands Senior High School student had won the beach flags in front of her family and friends at Scarborough two years ago. "I'm very happy with that win, a second gold medal," said Murphy, who like so many competitors wore a black arm band in memory of Saxon Bird.

GOLD: Gabrielle Murphy (City of Perth) SILVER: Georgia Devlin (Nth Burleigh) BRONZE: Danielle Thorp (Scarboro)

UNDER-17 MEN

Grange flyer Jordan Caldwow joined his mum as an Aussies gold medallist when he zoomed through the gates to win the under-17 beach sprint. Caldwow showed why he will be a young man going places fast with his eye-catching pace for a club steeped in history in beach sprinting and beach flags.

GOLD: Jordan Caldwow (Grange) SILVER: Sean Hill (Quinns Mindarie) BRONZE: Bryce Ellis (Quinns Mindarie)

UNDER-15 WOMEN

Talented Cronulla teen Bree Masters has created history, becoming the first girl to win back-to-back under-15 beach sprint crowns. Masters, who is studying dance at the Newtown High School of Performing Arts, won the title at Scarborough as a 13-year-old. She paid tribute to her coach Steve Strawbridge who devoted so much time to her and the Cronulla beach team.

GOLD: Bree Masters (Cronulla) SILVER: Taylah Davies (Terrigal) BRONZE: Siobhan Dibley (Cronulla).

UNDER 15 MEN

Coogee's Hugh Miller broke through for his maiden gold medal with a stirring performance in a red-hot under-15 men's final. The 14-year-old Independent Grammar School student thrust his hands in the air when the judges announced his victory. "It's just such a good feeling to win the Aussies gold," said Miller.

GOLD: Hugh Miller (Coogee) SILVER: Christopher Wellington (Ayr) BRONZE: Gus Drew (Cooks Hill).

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

8am	March Past and Grande Parade (all members welcome to participate in Grande Parade)
9am	Ecumenical Service, including tribute to Saxon Bird <i>Speakers include Tom Atkinson (Queenscliff SLSC) and Ian Grant OAM (Life Member SLSA)</i>
9.50am	Meritorious Awards presentation and President's Medal announcement
10am	Beach flags commences
11am	Announcement of 2010 High Performance Squad