



Luke Stedman at the Pipeline Masters in Hawaii.

Picture: ASP ROWLAND.

Slater inspires Luke to make ASP top 10

Jason Avedissian
surfing

THE inspiration of watching Kelly Slater march towards a ninth world title this year is driving Avalon's Luke Stedman to continue lifting his own standards.

Stedman completed the 2008 ASP World Championship Tour in 11th place, his finest season ever among surfing's elite company.

The 32-year-old finished the season-ending Billabong Pipeline Masters with a quarter-final showing at the famous North Shore break.

Stedman said watching Slater win the event in Hawaii - incredibly the American's sixth victory of the year - and the world title earlier in the season is a prime motivator for all competitors on tour.

"It's 100 per cent completely inspiring," Stedman said from his second home in Hawaii yesterday.

"If you hear Kelly in interviews, he says he's reaching his peak now.

"Watching him at the Pipeline Masters was amazing.

"He was riding the shortest boards and it was sort of moments

like that when you think; 'wow, he's still pushing the limits'.

"He gets the best out of himself and is an inspiration for a lot of people."

Stedman ended the year with 5018 points, trailing Jeremy Flores (5214) who rounded-out the top 10.

It was the natural-footer's consistent results which ensured he was always on the cusp of the top surfers with a semi-final showing at the Billabong Pro in Mundaka his best result.

"I was super excited by my end of year result," Stedman said.

"I definitely had the most consistent year I've had.

"I perform best when I'm smiling, and I've been laughing all year."

But now the focus remains on encroaching on that elusive top 10 in 2009, his sixth crack at the WCT.

"I'll just do the same thing and make sure I do everything better," Stedman said.

"It's about applying more time and effort to everything I do."

● The women's Billabong Pro in Maui was again on hold yesterday, with Layne Beachley awaiting to contest her quarter-final in what is her final event as a full-time competitor on the WCT.

Proteas tipped to put Punter under pump

Jason Avedissian
cricket

NSW selector and former Test fast bowler Matthew Nicholson believes the South Africans are ready to upset Ricky Ponting's Australians when the first Test starts at the WACA Ground in Perth today.

The Narrabeen-based Blues selector believes the Australians must be at their best to down the Proteas.

Australia go into the opening match of the three-Test series without former Manly quick Stuart Clark (elbow) who is out for the summer.

But Nicholson is confident experienced paceman Brett Lee will lift in Clark's absence, and is also convinced the tourists can push the Australians.

"I watched South Africa play England in England this year and they have really got a formidable bowling line-up," Nicholson, who is now focused on a career as a mentor for young sportspeople, said yesterday.

"It's the first time in a long time the Australians will be under the pump on their home soil.

"The Australian public are getting bored of Australia winning all the time here, and I think it's going to be a really exciting summer.

"South Africa have got some really exciting players and if they can put Australia under pressure, it will be a great series.

"Every Australian loves to see a contest. But I think some people also want to see the Australians brought down a peg, and the South Africans have the ability to do that."

Nicholson is certain Lee will step up as the leader of the Australian attack.

"He's ready to go," the Gordon skipper said.

"He didn't have a great tour of India but he bowled with illness.

"Against New Zealand, he started to really hit his straps and bowled with plenty of pace.

"He's got the experience to lead the attack."

● Narrabeen paceman Mark Cameron will be part of the Blues' Sheffield Shield squad to play South Australia at the SCG from tomorrow.

Olympian heads all-star cast

AUSTRALIA'S most successful paddler has confirmed his place in this weekend's annual 20 Beaches ski race along the northern beaches.

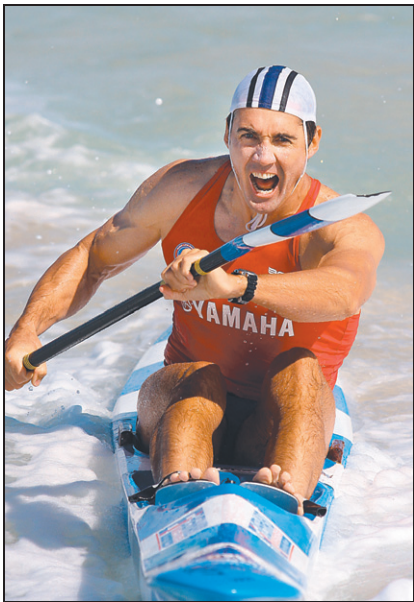
Five-time Olympian Clint Robinson will lead a formidable line-up, which also includes renowned two-time Coolangatta Gold winner Caine Eckstein and defending 20 Beaches champion Jeremy Cotter.

Peninsula paddlers Tim Jacobs, Murray Stewart, Dean Gardiner, Nick Holt, Brett Tyack, Mark Anderson and Dave Kissane will also be along for the 25km ride from Palm Beach to Manly on Sunday.

Sponsors Epic Kayaks have also thrown \$10,000 in as prizemoney, making it one of the finest events on the ski calendar this summer. "It is the best field I have seen for any Australian race in the last 10 years," Kissane said yesterday.

Robinson's record is unmatched - having won 36 national surf lifesaving titles along with his three Olympic medals - but Jacobs, having recently won the Dubai Shamaal, and his peninsula mates will be desperate to oust him.

The race starts at 1pm on Sunday and will run from either Manly or Palm Beach, depending on the wind.



Paddling star Clint Robinson.

TODAY'S SUDOKU PUZZLE

Level: Easy

	7		9		2		6	
	4		8		6		1	
		2				9		
	6	8		3		5	4	
4								7
	1	7		4		3	2	
		6				7		
	2		6		3		5	
	8		7		1		9	

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To complete, fill in all squares so each row, column and each of the nine 3x3 squares contain all digits from one to nine. That means that no number is repeated in any row, column or box. Tips on how to complete SUDOKU can be found at www.sudoku.com.

SOLUTION

4	6	9	1	2	7	3	8	5
1	9	8	3	6	9	4	2	7
2	3	7	5	4	8	6	1	9
9	2	3	8	4	5	7	1	6
7	8	1	6	9	2	3	5	4
6	4	5	7	3	1	8	9	2
8	7	6	4	1	3	2	5	9
5	1	2	9	7	8	6	4	3
3	9	4	2	5	6	1	7	8