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HAWAII'S SURF MAGAZINE



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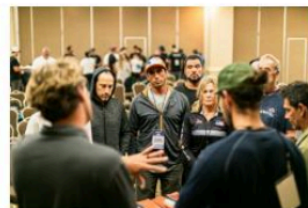


Tanner Hendrickson, Honolua Bay. Photo: gOnzo



Gudauskas Brothers' Positive Vibe Warriors Provide Youth with Scholarships to the **Big Wave Risk Assessment Group Safety Summit**

By Mara Pyzel Photos Sarah Lee



The crowd collectively held their breath as they watched the limp body of a young teen get rushed up the beach by lifeguards. As they began performing CPR, the grom's friends paddled in. Big Island's Diesel Butts was met at the shoreline by Sunset Beach's Jake Maki, and together the concerned teens bolted up the beach to be by the boy's side. We would later learn that Diesel was part of a group of boys in the water that day who helped save their friend's life putting into action the life saving skills they learned just a week prior while attending the Big Wave Risk Assessment Group's water safety training summit. In an interview with Freesurf during the summit, Jake commented, "I surf a lot of waves where people get injured, so eventually, you'll have to step in and help out." That "eventually" came sooner than Jake and his fellow groms had expected.


The scary scene took place at the awards ceremony for the Billabong Pipe Masters when, mid-interview, Kelly Slater paused, noticing the lifeguards springing into action just down the beach. "Brian [Keaulana] was the person who came in on the ski and was directed by the kids using the signaling for where to go and how to respond," said pro surfer and Positive Vibe Warrior co-founder Dane Gudauskas. "That was really helpful in saving those minutes for Brian." The youngster was rushed away by ambulance and 22 stitches and a concussion

later, was healthy enough to be released. But for beachgoers, the event served as a reminder of just how crucial an understanding of ocean safety can be. Knowing this, two groups have been especially proactive - The Big Wave Risk Assessment Group (BWRAG) and Dane Gudauskas and his brothers' foundation Positive Vibe Warriors. In early December, Positive Vibe Warriors partnered with the BWRAG, granting scholarships to local groms to attend a two-day training course. "[My brothers and I] took the BWRAG class a couple of years ago," said Dane. "It totally changed the way we were doing what we're doing, and how we were using the ocean. We realized that we were missing out on a huge part of it, just understanding safety [...] because when it goes down, we're going to be the ones who are the first responders, just by being in the lineup."


Dane Gudauskas and his brothers Tanner and Pat, grew up surfing competitively in Southern California. In response to the highs and lows that inevitably accompany competing, the trio created a "positive mantra" to live by. "People were gravitating towards the message," remembers Dane. They soon launched their nonprofit Positive Vibe Warriors to share stoke, safety, and waves with budding surf cultures around the world. The brothers' sponsor, Vans, showed its support for the movement, partnering with Positive Vibe Warriors for Stoke-

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O-Rama events to keep the nonprofit thriving. “[The Stoke-O-Ramas] allow us to have a platform to raise money to give back to youth water safety programs and we’ve done the surfboard drives. We’ve done three so far: for Jamaica, all of Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago. Those have been really fun.”

Their global reach has proven successful because Dane, Tanner, and Pat recognize the specific needs of each community. In both California and Hawai‘i, water safety is at the forefront. December’s training took place in the belly of the beast when it comes to big wave surfing: O‘ahu’s North Shore. Through an Instagram contest, Positive Vibe Warriors provided four stand-outs with scholarships: Diesel Storm Butts and Jake Maki, along with Bettylou Sakura (Hale‘iwa) and Chrislyn Simpson-Kane (Maui), all attended the training. “We had to put in the work with our hands to learn more,” said Bettylou. “I gained knowledge to keep. And maybe I’ll help save a life. Hopefully [I’ll] never have to, but it’s always good to know,” stated the scholarship recipient. Though the training was an intensive multi-day hybrid of classroom learning and in-water education, the kids’ attention span matched that of the 50 adults attending the same training. “I think it empowered them more than anything,” remarked Dane. “They feel like they are a part of the community, part of the tribe and they want to be their best. And they had to apply for it, too, so I felt like that gave the kids something, you know, like, ‘This is something I want to do. I’m going to put my hand up for this opportunity.’”

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The BWRAG’s motto is ‘Safety does not exist until you create it.’ which the group is doing, with help from highly qualified teachers including accomplished waterman Brian Keaulana, Danilo Couto, WSL Water Safety team member Ryan Hargrave, and big wave chargers Andrea Moller, Kohl Christensen, and Greg Long. “The organization just blows my mind with what they are teaching and how they are teaching it. Those guys, I would consider the highest level waterman in the world, so it’s a real honor,” Dane said of the BWRAG. With the success of the scholarship program’s aid in incorporating more youth into the water safety training summit this year, the expansion of the youth-focused classes is something Positive Vibe Warriors has already begun ruminating on for future trainings with the BWRAG. “These are tools that everyone can use. There’s value in just being aware and looking out for one another you know?” said Dane. The nail-biting situation at Pipeline in December serves as a reminder to us all of the importance of water safety and the life-altering role of those with whom you share the lineup.