

4

Body, Mat and Belly Board Surfing

TALES OF BODYSURFING AND BELLY BOARD (*paiipo*) SURFING abound in the ancient legends of Oceania. The sport attracted young and old. Its lore features romance, contests and the names of famous chiefs and it is probably an older sport than board surfing. Some board surfers today think bodysurfing is a humiliating act they are forced to do to retrieve their boards after wipeouts. A smouldering war-of-liberation attitude exists in the hearts of many bodysurfers toward board surfers. To the board surfers, bodysurfers are obstacles. To the bodysurfers, boards are a menace, the bodysurfers getting cut out of good rides by faster sliding boards or bouncing around in the board's wakes.

If bodysurfers and board surfers are mixed together in a

take-off site, the bodysurfers may be heard urging the board riders to wait for the seventh wave in a set of six. Another ruse is to stir up a shark-like commotion in the water just as a set approaches. The board surfers, believed to be the unstable and excitable type, are supposed to flee on the first smaller wave leaving the better ones for the bodysurfers. If the shark commotion is real, the bodysurfers are at a disadvantage! Other ways that bodysurfers believe they can turn the emotional instability of board surfers to their own purposes include swimming up under boards and biting legs or laughing at wiped-out board surfers struggling in the bone yard without swim-fins.

Some surfers believe that bodysurfers have a more accurate estimate of the height of waves, one of the most popular subjects among surfers. When they get dumped over the falls, bodysurfers, starting higher on the crest, experience a longer period of zero gravity than board surfers. They say they estimate the height of waves by the number of seconds of free fall. Then too, looking up at the crest of a wave from the eye level of a bodysurfer, one gets a better appreciation of the size of a wave than when sitting up on a board, say the bodysurfers.

Rocky coast-lines keep property-conscious board surfers away in droves leaving some choice sites free for bodysurfers who learn to wend their way around familiar rocks and channels. Those with live coral growing in their foreheads are usually the best ones to consult on reefs and shoals.

HOW TO BEGIN

It should be obvious that knowing how to swim well is a prerequisite for any sport in the surf. Quite often, however, the young or inexperienced think that they can han-