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## ***LIST OF SWIMMING SKILLS FOR SURFERS***

THIS SECTION is essential to everything that follows. It concerns the only really indispensable "equipment" for successful surfing: certain minimum abilities in the water. Upon these, all else can be built. Without them, progress is either impossible or so unwise as to be foolhardy.

This section also introduces a most useful supplement to these basic swimming abilities—a supplement commonly called "swim fins." These can add greatly to ease and enjoyment in mat-surfing, belly-board-surfing, and body-surfing. (Fins are not suitable for full-board surfing.)

Swimmers who have grown up around and in the surf have a great advantage at surfing; yet good swimmers from inland areas have also become outstanding surfers. Competence in "ordinary" ice-skating is a prerequisite for fancy or figure skating. General "surfmanship" and competence in swimming are similarly prerequisites for successful surf-riding.

How good a swimmer does a future surfer need to be? Rather good, as far as stamina and "savvy" are concerned (mere speed is not a criterion). Fortunately, these qualities can be developed through practice and exercise in the water. Reading books and thumbing through surfing magazines are not substitutes for actual experience.

The author admires and endorses the safety program of the United States Surfing Association. This organization, worthy of the support and the membership of all surfers, has stressed physical preparation, be-

## SURFING

cause in surfing, as in many other sports, "physical preparedness and mental conditioning determine the degree of success or failure." However, in surfing, unlike most sports, "failures . . . can result in death."

What are the essentials of such physical preparedness? First, without doubt, "learning to swim well." And this means more than being able to float or dog-paddle or tread water for a while. Here is what a beginner should be able to do in order to become a surfer in safety, according to the U.S.S.A.:

- (1) Swim 100 yards at full strength.
- (2) Swim 500 yards at controlled pace.
- (3) Remain submerged for at least 20 to 30 seconds.
- (4) Have the physical strength to keep control of his surfboard while paddling outward through at least two sets of breaking waves (a set consisting of from three to seven waves).

This kind of competence can be tested and demonstrated in any swimming pool. It doesn't require a trip to a beach area. The author suggests that prospective surfers develop certain additional accomplishments either before, or while, they start their actual surf work:

- (5) Tread water for 20 minutes, keeping the mouth always above the surface. At the end of that time, swim 100 yards without stopping.
- (6) Swim at least 60 feet under water.
- (7) Using a small float or kick-board, swim at least 100 yards, using legs only, either in breast-stroke (frog), scissors, or flutter kick.

Such simple capabilities can be tested in the company of one or more friends who are, perhaps, also interested in surfing. No surfer has ever regretted acquiring any additional swimming ability!

*Adding fins.* Success in swimming will determine when the time is ripe to add fins to other swimming and presurfing skills. Fins should follow, not precede, the finless achievements previously suggested. This applies even to those who intend, or think they intend, to learn only mat, belly-board, or body-surfing, in all of which fins are so useful. In such forms of surfing, even the most adept surfer will at some time or other lose one or both fins as a result of encountering rough water, or perhaps because of the aging and breaking of the substance from which fins are made.

The "rule-of-fin" is simple: A swimmer should never propel himself by means of fins into surf situations that he would surely avoid if he

## List of Swimming Skills for Surfers

weren't wearing them. Fins are fine supplements to swimming skills. They must not, however, be used as *substitutes* for such skills.

*What kind of fins for surfing?* Anyone about to buy, beg, or borrow a pair of fins for surfing should try to get a pair suited not only to his foot size but also to actual surf conditions. Unless he is a very special case, he will probably do best with rubber fins that are fairly flexible and fairly short.

Long, deeply ribbed, and rigid fins such as trained frogmen wear in TV productions are not suitable for surf. They are tiring because they impose a heavy strain on leg muscles; they are clumsy in a turbulent swash; and they are not suited to the short, sharp sprints the surfer will want to develop for wave take-offs.

A pair of fins whose tips project no longer than 6½ or 7 inches beyond the big toe are best. When checking fins for flexibility, the surfer should note whether or not the fins return to their original shape when released from tension. Good surfing fins may be quite "floppy"—but they shouldn't be "sloppy" in the sense of remaining distorted or bent. And, of course, they should fit snugly but not tightly.

The best all-around *surfing* fins, in the author's opinion and the opinion of many people he respects, were once made by the Voit Rubber Company and bore the identifying name of the designer, "Owen Churchill, Los Angeles." Regrettably, the past tense is necessary: for some reason this particular model is no longer offered. The same manufacturer makes other fin models, but none nearly so well suited to the surf.

These "Owen Churchill" fins were one-piece and had no buckles or separate straps. At the time of this writing, surfers are offering premium prices for used pairs of this style.

Whatever fins are finally chosen for surfing, they should float. The reason for this advice should be obvious. Objects floating in the surf or just beyond it usually are carried ashore sooner or later. A fin, if lost in the water, may float in and be retrieved.

Like other rubber or plastic gear used in the water, fins should be kept out of direct sunlight as much as possible. Acids, oils, and tars should also be avoided. Some fin owners flush off the salt water after each surf use. However, this seems to have few noticeable benefits.

*Putting fins to work.* With a pair of well-fitting fins, whether owned,