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Spending Time Sideways

Wakeboard athletes practice multiple board sports to prepare for championship.

By: Makayla Smith

Pro Nautique team athlete Noah Flegel wakesurfs behind a Nautique boat at the USA National Wakesurf Championships on the Brazos River in Waco, Texas. Photo courtesy of Nautique Boats.

Summer may be over, but this weekend the World Wake Association (WWA) and GM Marine Engine Technology are hitting the river for the Nautique USA National Wakesurf Championships presented by GM Marine Engine Technology from Sept. 28 to Sept. 30 on the Brazos River downtown at 202 S. University Park Drive.

The event will have multiple levels of competition with surfers of all ages and experience to come together, alongside the world's top professional athletes.

Included among the athletes that will be at the championships this weekend is Amazing Race Season 19 participant and past U.S. Olympic Snowboard Tommy Czeschin. Czeschin is from Mammoth Lakes, Calif., and grew up snowboarding and eventually became a professional snowboarder. He competed in the 2002 Olympics in the half-pipe and has also competed in the X-games. Czeschin said being in the Olympics was an exciting experience for him and that snowboarding helped him with his wake surfing skills.

"It was definitely one of the best experiences of my life," Czeschin said. "They take four men and four women every four years to the Olympics so you've got to be the best of the best and you've got to be on that year going into the Olympics … It was quite a deal to even make the team, and then to be able to be in my own country for the Olympics was pretty special … Any time you can spend standing sideways on a board is going to help other board sports. So if you snowboard, if you skate board, if you wake surf … any time you spend sideways is going to help."

Having wakesurfed for about 10 years now, Czeschin said his biggest accomplishment is having his own signature board with Liquid Force and being a Nautique team rider and "helping Nautique with whatever I can."

Czeschin will be competing for his first National Wakesurf Championship this weekend in the Pro Men's Wakesurf division, and his Amazing Race teammate Andy Finch will be hitting the water Friday in the Masters Wakesurf division.

WWA executive director Corrie Wilson has been the executive director for about five years and helps to play a role in creating different formats, the rules and with the event production. The course for the weekend is set up on the Brazos where riders will have a couple runs to do different tricks with both styles, Wilson said.

"We have a course set up that is about 900 feet long with buoys on each end, so they will go down and back through that course and through that course they're able to do whatever tricks they would like," Wilson said. "They can surf on both sides of the wake if they want to transfer, if they want to surf different styles. It's total freedom within the course and they have two pick ups. After the first fall they'll be done, but they've got some room to try some things and get creative."

This weekend, the formats of the competition are being shaken up from what they usually are. The two different styles that are usually judged are skim and surf.

This weekend, both styles will be judged together for the first time. Czeschin said the difference between the two styles is the type of boards used, but in the end, it's still wake surfing.

"Skim style, you're riding boards typically with either no fin or very small single fins in the middle of the board like a tracking fin. Surf style you would be riding a twin fin or a quad fin and the boards going to be a little bit thicker," Czheschin said. "It's a little bit different style but we're all wake surfing."

By combining the two styles, riders who don't normally compete against each other will do just that for the first time. This creates more competition between the riders, especially between some of the best riders in the world.

Two of the best women's riders, Jodi Grassman, the reigning National Champion, and Ashley Kidd, do not usually compete against each other due to one surfing skim and the other surf, but since they will be judged together, Czheschin said "it's going to be like the battle royale."

Wilson said the Championships are being held here in Waco because of how much the city has to offer with the BSR Cable Park and the Brazos River. In the past the BSR has hosted events for the WWA and that relationship encouraged the event to be brought to Waco.

"We've done other events in Waco before, and the city of Waco has just always been a real big supporter of wake events and bringing us here and supporting what we're doing, helping us spread the word," Wilson said. "So that's something we look for when we go different places … Just a lot of support here in Waco and then the great river, downtown aspect of the Brazos."

The Championships begin Friday morning at 8 a.m. with the Girl's Wakesurf Semifinals and goes until 3:30, ending with the Veteran's Men Wakesurf Semifinals.

Saturday begins with the Women's Wakesurf Semifinals and ends with the Pro men Wakesurf Quarterfinals from 1 to 3 p.m Saturday night there is also a beach party from 5 to 10 p.m. at BSR and is a "family-friendly event will allow you to kick back and relax with food, music, and the best wave pool on the planet," the press release said.

All finals will take place on Sunday beginning at 8 a.m. with the Jr. Women's Wakesurf Finals and ending with the Pro Women and Men Wakesurf Finals at 2 and 2:30 p.m., respectively.

BU Volleyball Takes Tough Loss After Many Mistakes

By: Jackson Scott

Coming off a close win over Iowa State, No. 21 Baylor volleyball suffered its second conference loss of the season at No. 4 Texas Wednesday in Austin.

The Bears were unable to find a way to win a set as they surrendered all three to the Longhorns. The first set was the closest of the three as Baylor was able to get 23 points, right under the 25 needed to take the set.

Baylor hopped out to a 17-13 lead after a kill from senior outside hitter Aniah Philo, but Texas took the opening set after eight service errors and then an attack error at set point.

Baylor fought for the second set, but four straight points for the Longhorns led to a 9-4 lead that Baylor could never come back from, losing set two 25-16.

Baylor's offense struggles continued into the third frame where they hit -.026 to drop the final set 25-15.

Sophomore outside hitter Yossiana Pressley led both teams in the match with 11 of Baylor's 36 total kills. The Bears led in both kills and assists in the match but were unable to get past the Longhorns' defense which posted 12 blocks.

The attack for the Bears fell much shorter of the Longhorns with only successfully hitting .107, while Texas was able to have an attacking percentage of .333. Sophomore setter Hannah Lockin led both teams in assists with 28 after only recording six in the previous match against the Cyclones.

A major part of the match that hurt the Bears was the amount of errors they had with 25, the same amount of points needed to win a set with seven, eight and 10 through the match. The Bears gave up six straight points in the third set to make them go from four points to eight, then four to 13.

Baylor Alum Offers Support

By: Ruth Jones

Baylor head coach Matt Rhule received a text message from Nick Florence on Thursday night. Florence, a quarterback for the Bears from 2009 to 2012, offered words of encouragement for the second-year head coach.

With the Bears coming off a 40-27 loss to Duke at McLane Stadium the previous Saturday, Florence told Rhule he believed in what the team was doing and asked if there was anything he could do to help.

Florence

Rhule asked Florence to speak to the team prior to their game against Kansas, and Rhule said the speech had a significant impact on the team.

"I thought it was really one of the pivotal moments in trying to build a football program," Rhule said. "And that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to build a football program."

Florence shared the story of the 2012 Baylor football team with this year's group.

Florence served as the third-string quarterback in 2009, but started games down the stretch of the season due to injuries. Florence played sparingly as a sophomore and junior, serving as the backup to Heisman trophy winner Robert Griffin III.

When Griffin left for the NFL in 2012, Florence took over the starting job as a senior. The Bears had a rocky start to the season, overcoming a halftime deficit to beat Sam Houston State at home and scraping by Louisiana-Monroe with a win of 47-42 to close their non-conference schedule.

To open Big 12 play, Baylor lost four games in a row.

The Bears picked up a win over Kansas, but fell to No. 12 Oklahoma to drop to 4-5 overall and 1-5 in the Big 12. With the No. 1 team in the country coming to Waco, the Bears needed to turn their season around. They did just that with a 52-24 upset of Kansas State.

Baylor went on to defeat Texas Tech and No. 23 Oklahoma State en route to a Holiday Bowl appearance. The Bears took down No. 17 UCLA 49-26 to finish the year 8-5.

In the Holiday Bowl victory, Florence broke Griffin's record from the previous year for passing yards in a single season in Baylor football history with 4,309.

Rhule said the key takeaway from the story is that the team stopped pointing fingers and rallied together to finish the season strong.

"And so Nick told the team about how all of a sudden, in the middle of that year, through all the adversity and people saying things, they just stopped worrying about 'Is it the offense? Is it the defense?'" Rhule said. "They came together as a team."

When Florence gave the speech, the Bears had a winning record, but they were coming off a loss to Duke in which they were favored.

They were only favored to beat Kansas by one touchdown with key conference matchups against Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, TCU and West Virginia looming in the distance.

XC Kicks Into Gear

By: Jillian Thomas

Baylor cross country competes at the Joe Piane Invitational on Friday in Notre Dame, Ind., after taking a three-week break.

The Bears last competed at the UTA Invitational on Sept. 7 in Arlington after opening the season at the Bear Twilight Invitational in Waco on Aug. 31.

Baylor associate head coach Jon Capron said the team is ready to get back to competing against other schools after a three-week hiatus from competition.

"We've had a pretty good training block that's been a little bit of a grind," Capron said. "They are excited to not be training. I think once they get a sniff of fall, they are going to feel pretty good about their fitness. I don't know the full forecast, but I know it's going to be cooler than here. We're just excited to get somebody else to race other than ourselves, and just ready to compete."

Thirty-seven schools will be in attendance for the women's race, with 31 lined up on the men's side. Competing teams include Clemson, Duke, Florida State, Iowa, LSU, Oklahoma and host Notre Dame, among others.

Sophomore Brooke Gilmore said the Bears are ready to get back to the course and look forward to facing so many schools.

"We're so ready. We've been practicing really hard and coming together as a team," Gilmore said. "It's something we look forward to because we get to go out there and compete against really good competition."

Capron said the way the schedule has turned out, the women's team has been pit against really good teams.

"The ladies are going to go up against some of the better teams in the country right now," Capron said. "They're going to have their hands full, but I think we're going to be able to hold our own."

The invitational opens with the blue division women's 5K at noon and then men's 5-mile at 12:45 p.m.. The gold division will run at 2:15 and 3 p.m., respectively. The Baylor women will run in the blue division.

Redshirt sophomore Aaliyah Miller was added to the cross country roster this week. A track athlete, Miller last ran a cross country meet in 2016 for the Bears. Capron said Miller has been working on distance running with track head coach Todd Harbour.

"[Aaliyah Miller] has been working with Coach Harbour, mostly," Capron said. "Based on some of her workouts, we dropped her into a workout Monday and she fit right in. She's kind of a new addition to our racing roster. She's been on the cross roster, but she might be a pretty helpful addition when you have a girl that has her ability level and her speed and applying that to a cross country race. As long as she has the fitness, and that's what Coach Harbour has been working with her on, there's no telling how much she can help us."

The Baylor men will compete in the gold division at 3 p.m. on Friday. Capron said the men should be able to hold their own against the bevy of schools competing in the invitational.

"The guys should be in great shape," Capron said. "They're going to be in a different division than the ladies are, but I'm really excited about their opportunities to get a little confidence and work amongst a group they should be able to compete really well with."

Capron said he expects his runners to have a lot of success given the cool Indiana weather.

"From the bottom all the way to the top, I'm looking for everyone to have a personal record-type day," Capron said. "This course is fast, the cool weather is going to inspire some of us, and I really am expecting great performances."

The Bears will get a week off following the Joe Piane Invitational before running in the NCAA Pre-Nationals on Oct. 13 in Madison, Wisc.