
Surfing community mourns Noll's death

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The surfing community is mourning after the passing of 84-year-old Greg Noll, a pioneer in big-wave surfing, who died of natural causes on June 28.

If you've ever watched the 1966 classic surfing film, "The Endless Summer" you've seen a brief glimpse of him streaking across a giant wave off the coast of Oahu. Noll was given the nickname "Da Bull" both for his bullish appearance, and the way he charged down a wave.

Noll grew up in Manhattan Beach, and began surfing at the age of 11. By 15, he was shaping his own boards out of Balsa wood in his parent's garage, and later, at the infamous surfboard shaper Dale Velzy's shop. Committing himself to the sport, Noll decided to complete his last year of high school in Hawaii to chase bigger waves.

And, the waves Noll was chasing kept getting bigger and bigger. In 1957, he became one of the first to surf Waimea Bay in Oahu, which is now known for some of the biggest wave surfing in the world.

Noll described his experience of paddling out for the first time at the North Shore Pipeline — another big wave spot in Oahu — in a recent interview with Surflife.

“The thing was just glistening like diamonds off the face of this wave, just a big beautiful, grinding thing...You look back man, and I wouldn’t trade any of it,” he said.

Later in his career, Noll began to focus more on creating surfboards, and launched his own line of handcrafted boards. His surfboard company, Noll Surfboards, is still around today and is run by his son Jed in San Clemente. Noll was also one of the first surf film filmmakers, along with fellow surfer Bud Brown.

“I was so stoked on surfing that I just wanted to make a living any way I could. If there was a buck in going out and waxing boards for guys, I probably would have done it,” said Noll in a 1996 interview with The Surfer’s Journal. “I wanted to shape boards, I wanted to make movies, I wanted to be a part of surfing in any way that I could.”

After easing out of surfing, Noll went up to Alaska and got involved in the commercial fishing trade. Eventually, he moved back to California and lived out the remainder of his life in Hiouchi, along the Smith River, where he spent his time steelhead fishing.

Still, his heart never left surfing. He continued to build boards with his son and became a cheerleader for the sport through radio and television interviews.

Greg is survived by his wife, Laura, and their four children, Ashlyn, Jed, and Rhyn. A fourth child, Tate, is deceased.