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W A V E S

YOUNG-GUN SURFER JULIAN WILSON HAD HIS CHALLENGES LAST YEAR, BUT HE'S DETERMINED TO MAKE THIS YEAR GREAT – AND HE'S OFF TO A GOOD START

WORDS MITCH BROOK • PHOTOS MITCH ROSS



IN THE MOMENT

While he's competitive, Julian enjoys any time he spends on his board

"MY FIRST MEMORY OF SURFING IS BEING DOWN AT FIRST POINT, NOOSA

with my brothers, Seb and Bart, and my parents, Mick and Nola," says Julian Wilson, the 26-year-old professional surfer from Coolum, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. "I was playing in the sand, playing in the water and getting pushed into waves by my mum while the rest of the crew were surfing out the back."

This innocuous first surfing memory was a turning point for Julian. He has since made a career as a surfer on the international pro circuit.

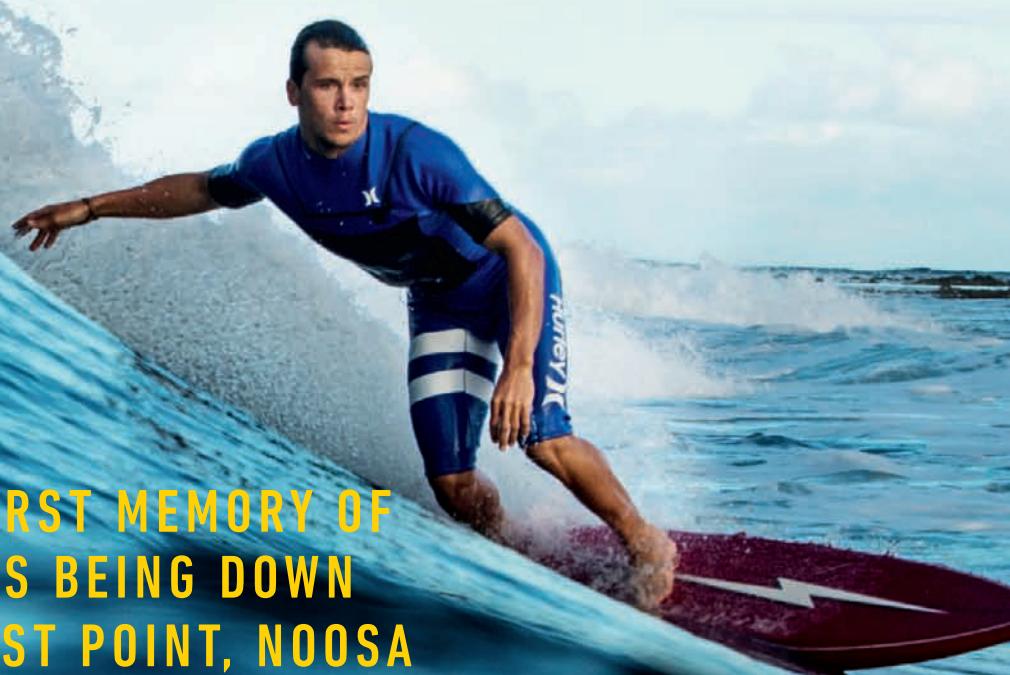
"My brothers are three and five years older than me, and had been surfing since they could walk," says Julian. "It was a natural path for me to do the same."

While he was just a grommet back then, he's now been on the World Championship Tour (WCT) for four

years, with his best result being ranked sixth in 2013.

While many expected the 26-year-old to continue his rise last year, 2014 started off being not the best for Julian, with his WCT ranking slipping to 21 towards the end of the year. This put his place on tour at risk, as only the top 22 automatically qualify for the next year's WCT. To ensure his place, he put in extra effort in Qualification Series events (a separate ranking, the top 10 of which enter the WCT). With great successes at the O'Neill SP Prime in Brazil and the Reef Hawaiian Pro, placing fifth and second respectively, Julian locked in a third-place ranking in the Qualification Series, and thus his place on 2015's WCT.

"I don't place more importance necessarily on one event over another."



“WINNING THE PIPE MASTERS IS THE BIGGEST COMPETITIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF MY CAREER WITHOUT A DOUBT”

he says, “but towards the back end of last year I needed to go and get a few results on the Qualification Series to back myself up, and did that in Brazil and Hawaii.”

The real turnaround for Julian came with his performance at the Hawaiian Pipe Masters in December of last year. Julian not only won that event (against 2014 World Champion Gabriel Medina in the final) but also took out the Triple Crown of Surfing title, meaning that he came out on top overall at the three Hawaiian WCT events – the Pipe Masters, the Reef Hawaiian Pro, and the World Cup of Surfing. The performance boosted Julian’s WCT ranking to 14.

“Winning the Pipe Masters is the biggest competitive accomplishment of my career without a doubt,” says Julian. “Adding the Triple Crown on top of that shows me I’m capable of reaching the levels of success I’ve always wanted.”

With his standing locked in, Julian will aim to continue his good results into this year’s events, starting off with the Australian Open of Surfing in Manly, Sydney, held this month. At each competition on the circuit he’ll be looking to replicate his success at the Pipe Masters.

“I’m trying to win every event I compete in,” he says, but the bold statement is offset with the realisation that he’s doing what he loves: “I have an amazing opportunity to do what I do and compete on the World Tour. It’s important for me to enjoy that while chasing success.”

The high-stakes WCT really takes off with the Quiksilver Pro Gold Coast event, which also starts this month. It’s as close as the international tour gets to Julian’s hometown of Coolum Beach, and he’s one to watch at the event. Spectators are sure to notice him because of the trademark ➤



bright pink board shorts he wears and the matching board he rides.

"I am an ambassador for the National Breast Cancer Foundation," he says. "I was inspired by my friend Matthew Hayden, who started using a pink cricket-bat grip to raise awareness for breast cancer. I saw an opportunity for me to do something similar. I'm trying to reach a bit of a younger audience in an effort to educate women and girls of all ages about the importance of checking yourself and early detection."

It's a cause that's particularly important for Julian – his mother Nola is a two-time breast-cancer survivor.

"I couldn't be more proud of the way she beat it both times. I'm so thankful that she did," he says. And not only are the board and shorts in an eye-catching shade of pink, but Nola herself creates their designs.

"Mum is very talented," says Julian. "She has a unique style that I like. I just gave her a surfboard to use as her canvas and she did some great stuff, so I love to give her that opportunity whenever I can. My sponsors such as Hurley also liked her style and it's become a bit of a theme for me. It's great to have Mum's input on design and have a tie between my boards and board shorts from time to time."

For now, Julian is preparing for his first 2015 appearances on the waves for the Qualification Series and the WCT, and getting some rest hanging ten at the break he enjoys surfing most in his spare time: "Home! Doesn't matter what the conditions are like – it's actually not very good most of the time – but I love being able to surf at home with family and friends." *

See Julian compete in Manly, Sydney, at the Australian Open of Surfing from 9 to 15 February, or at the Quiksilver Gold Coast Pro from 28 February to 8 March. australianopenofsurfing.com; quiksilver.com.au/progoldcoast