

IRISH NATIONALS

CAIN AND EASKEY TAKE HOME THE BACON – AGAIN!

THE DENNY IRISH SURFING CHAMPIONSHIPS saw some sizzling hot action in all divisions despite a bitterly cold easterly breeze that dominated conditions at Tullen Strand.

Fortunately the wind-chill factor was accompanied by dry and sunny April weather which provided some respite in the shifting 1.0 to 1.5 metre set waves.

Competitors were fully tested with full moon spring tides, disappearing sandbars and a howling offshore breeze that proved troublesome for most. The final of the Men's Open division saw New Zealander Liam Joyce nearly take the title with some excellent wave selection and vertical surfing on the next bank along from the main peak. Joyce, currently residing in Dublin, had surfed brilliantly on the same bank in the earlier rounds, displaying a fast and fluid repertoire of contemporary manoeuvres. After his comprehensive semi-final victory Joyce was asked to present his Irish passport to ISA officials to prove his eligibility. He was also randomly selected for drug testing by Government sporting officials – welcome to Ireland boyo! Two of the other three finalists, Mayo goofy footer Fergal Smith and Waterford's Dave Blount, elected to surf the main peak, but their strategy proved fatal, both finding waves elusive to catch with the tide rushing back in and the bank disappearing fast.

Halfway through the final, Blount paddled across to the next bank to join his fellow naturalfooters, but the game was up – time had run out for the popular Déise man. In fact, at this point Joyce was the only competitor to have scored a couple of decent set

waves which he attacked and duly made the most of. It looked certain the open title would be going abroad to the Land of the Long White Cloud, a first for Irish surfing!

However, there was still a fourth finalist in the water who'd been patiently sitting out the back waiting for his chance to impress the judges. Enniscrone's Cain Kilcullen thrilled the spectators lining the grassy cliff when he hit back with two high scoring waves in the dying minutes. Kilcullen had been surfing the same sandbar as Joyce in the earlier rounds and was in scintillating form. However, it seemed his good run had come to an end with an exceedingly long lull putting a halt to the anticipated action for most of the final.

Then, with only a few minutes to go, wave-God Manannán breathed life into the ocean again with a couple of late sets appearing on the horizon. Kilcullen picked off a good little left and let rip with one of his trademark ultra-radical backhand blasts to put him back in contention.

But the Yeats county man was saving his best for last. His final ride included one of the highest scoring manoeuvres of the event, a super-fast snap off the top with a radical tailslide combo. It was certainly the best righthander to come through in the final and he managed to catch it with only seconds to spare. The 22-year-old did more than enough to clinch a deserved victory and notch up his second Irish open title in three years.

Delighted with his win Kilcullen, said his strategy of surfing the next bank along had more to do with his preference for wanting to surf alone. "Surfing with other people can wreck your head especially in competitions when there aren't too many good waves coming in," he said with a contented smile. Kilcullen, modest as ever, said he wasn't expecting much to come of his victory in terms of attracting any new sponsorship. But if any big sponsors out there are looking to sign an extraordinary Irish free surfing talent, similar to Billabong's Brendan Margieson or Darren O'Rafferty, please look no further than Cain Kilcullen.

Portrush surfer John McCurry, clearly Ireland's most outstanding longboard talent.



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