

# 20 20 VISION

*Words by Lucy Small*

## ACROSS THE GENERATIONS AT THE WORLD SURFARIS NOOSA FESTIVAL OF SURFING 2020



Fast, precise, exciting, complete – 15-year-old Kelis Kaleopaa nailing the WSL Open Women's. Photos: Tommy Pierucki @tommypierucki

44-year-old Joel Tudor bought the whole act to the WSL Open Men's.  
Photo: Dave Gleeson @surfshortsnoosa



Peruvian star Maria Fernanda Reyes, wave of the day.  
Photos: Mark Morgan @mxmsurfphoto



There are these fleeting moments at Noosa that are enough to keep us returning on the annual pilgrimage to logging's Holy Land year after year. It's the moment when the sun has dipped below the peaks of the Blackall Ranges but night hasn't quite yet crossed the horizon. And

things become still. The voices of groms, subdued as they trek home for dinner and the many, many quick-footed surfers scampering down the bush tracks to escape the mosquitos. It is this moment, when the ocean turns rosewater, that you may get some of the most perfect waves of your life,

all alone. A moment that is often followed by a scramble across the rocks, trying not to ding a rail or break your ankle among the smooth black stones in the smooth black night.

Noosa Festival, it seems, is almost more about the free-surfing than it is about the





contest. Especially this year when a cyclone swell hurtled toward the Queensland coast a week before the travelling circus that is the World Surf League descended upon Noosa. Tropical cyclone Uesi collided with the points for a single day before evaporating into the Tasman Sea. This gave

us a taste of what might have been, and sent the Noosa Longboard Open, the first stop of the Longboard World Tour, down to the groynes with nothing at First Point but the muted lap of brown water against the shore. As luck would have it, the bank at Access 11 was actually quite good and

there were a few mornings, a few moments, that it peeled like a point or gave us a split peak that served to level out the playing field. That's until the midday low tide-onshore combination kicked and there were a few unlucky heats surfed in a bowl of river-water porridge.



Young Californian Summer Richley, casual foot drag – class! *Photo: Dave Gleeson @surfshortsnoosa*  
 (top left) The entertainer, Brazil's Augusto Olinto, in the WSL quarter finals. *Photo: Tommy Pierucki*  
 (top right) Brazilian great Chloe Calmon in the WSL semis. *Photo: Tommy Pierucki*



The first event of the year is when everyone in some way sizes up. Who has stepped things up a notch over the break? Which dangerous new faces have arrived? And which old guy has returned from retirement to remind all the ankle-biting groms who is king? The men's and women's WSL events, if we imagine the ages of the surfers along a curve, are skewed in opposite directions. In an all Hawaiian final, Kelis Kaleopa'a won over Sophia Culhane who was surfing in her first Longboard Tour event. And what a way to arrive. Having just turned 14, Sophia seemed unfazed by the fact that she was taking a sledgehammer to the old standings, tearing down the great modern names of the sport and arriving in the final to surf against Kelis, who is only 15. But Kelis doesn't surf like she's only 15. Kelis surfs like she has been hand-crafted specifically to do just that. Lines drawn in the finest Hawaiian silkworm thread, her feet up and down the board like she's wearing velvet slippers and every other smooth metaphor you can think of. That's how Kelis surfs and that's exactly how she took out her first ever Longboard World Tour event.

(left) Kelis in the rain. *Photo: Tommy Pierucki*  
(below) Runner-up in the WSL Open Women's, 14-year-old Waikiki local Sophia Culhane. *Photo: Mark Morgan*





Manly local and semi-finalist in the WSL Men's Declan Wyton – off into 2020 ranked world number three. *Photo: Mark Morgan*



Runner-up in the WSL Men's, rampaging Kevin Skvarna. *Photo: Mark Morgan*

Taka Inoue, the young styler from Japan. *Photo: Mark Morgan*



Noosa local Emily Lethbridge, who narrowly lost her WSL semi final to the eventual winner Kelis Keleopaa. *Pic: Dave Gleeson @surfshotsnoosa*





At almost triple Kelis' age, Joel Tudor won the men's WSL in what suddenly became the launch of his campaign for a third World Title. With his two mini-me's on the shoreline, Joel got a score in the last minute of the final to beat Kevin Skvarna who was out from California on a road trip with his mum Karen. Karen nervously waved her iPhone from the crowd, and Kevin's mullet flailed as the onshore tried to creep around the corner and ruin everything. Kevin looked good. Like, really good. His road to the final included taking down his buddy Steven Sawyer, a priority interference by Harrison Roach and Kevin looking like his meat pie diet had given him enough power to both hammer his board on rail and perch still and steady over the nose on the lefts he managed to find through to the inside. But Joel pipped him in the end in a final that had me sweating as it swung back and forth, the air heavy with both anticipation and precipitation while Judah Tudor tried to get a big stick stuck properly into the sand while dad won out front. As Joel accepted his trophy and announced that seeing he'd won he'd better work toward a World Title, I wondered if he'd called his kid Judah as an act of rebellion or as a phonetic combination of his own first and last names.

(above) The Champ Joel Tudor and youngest son Judah. Photos: Tommu Pierucki  
 Manly's young gun and WSL Women's quarter finalist Tully White, free-surfing Tea Tree.  
 Photo: Sarah Saunders @sarahaundersfiji





(left) Always pulls the biggest crowd of the week. *Photo: Fenna De King* (right) Oahu's Mahina Akaka. *Photo: Mark Morgan*



(left) Old mals . . . forever love. (right) Winners of the team championships, Team Okanui: Nic Jones, Declan Wyton, Charlotte Lethbridge, Ben Considine. *Photos: Fenna De King* (below) Groms in heaven - Brax Holstrom, Tilda Thomson, Millie Allwood, Will Samuel. *Photo: Mark Morgan*





Loose in Noosa, 2019 WSL Women's World Champ Honolua Blomfield and 2018 WSL Women's World Champ Soleil Errico. Photos: Tommy Pierucki

It felt strange for the WSL event to end and the festival with all its age and amateur divisions still to begin. As people trekked back and forth from Tea Tree to the groyne, Mahina Akaka with her yellow log loaded on a shopping trolley, the last tiny remnants of what might have been called swell dwindled away and everyone was left surfing the ripples made by a lost killer whale swimming offshore. Matt Chojnaki took a moment off the microphone to win the men's logger and Honolua Blomfield fired back from her quarter final loss in

the WSL event to win the women's logger. Tully White made the final of both the open women's and the women's logger with heat totals about 45 points higher than everyone else in the whole event, and Em Lethbridge managed to slash some rail turns even though the waves were barely up to her shins and made the final of the women's logger.

And then it was over and we wait eagerly as the WSL negotiates where and when the next events might be and who might be qualified, while the check-in staff at

Brisbane Airport shake their heads at having to deal with the mountains of logs that pile up in front of them as the tour leaves the country. And we hope that maybe 2021 will be the year that a cyclone delivers in the WSL window. Third time lucky right?

*The World Surfing Noosa Festival 2020 results from every round of the age, amateur, and specialty divisions can be found under "Heat Draw" at: [noosafestivalofsurfing.com](http://noosafestivalofsurfing.com)*

Old Mal winner and WSL title contender Harrison Roach. Photo: Mark Morgan

