

Tom Carroll

Former World Surfing Champion

When Tom Carroll went professional in 1979, he was the most vertically challenged bloke of the lot. At the time, it was still a big man's game, and the 5-foot-6-inch Carroll could compensate by driving a big truck or by becoming the definition of power and ripping into serious surf to become a giant in the field. Needless to say, he chose the latter.

Carroll was born in the Sydney suburb of Newport, Australia, where he has resided ever since. At the age of eight, he first stood on a tiny Coolite. Under the influence of Narrabeen's Col Smith, the diminutive goofyfoot tore through the amateur field. Twice champion of New South Wales (Schoolboys in 1974 and Juniors in 1977) and twice winner of the prestigious Pro Junior (1977 and 1980), he joined the IPS World Tour in 1979. From the outset, three factors told the Carroll story: conditioning, versatility and injuries.

After a steady rise — from 24th to 17th to ninth — Carroll locked into the top five in 1982 and wouldn't budge until the decade was out. He attacked all conditions with precision and power, winning in boat wakes at the 1983 Wave Wizards in Florida and in a swimming pool at the 1985 World Inland Pro in Pennsylvania. On the flipside, he dominated the 1982 World Cup at 8- to 10-foot Sunset. As Mark Richards stepped aside, Carroll filled the void, winning three consecutive events and becoming the first goofyfoot to earn a professional world title. He repeated in 1984 by staving off a late-career effort by Shaun Tomson and putting Tom Curren's destiny on hold. Carroll also won the Surfer Poll that year, proving he was a surfer's surfer and the people's choice.

In 1985, he took a personal stance against South Africa's policy of apartheid, contributing to the loss of his title to Curren. Carroll's boycott of the South African events established him as a freethinking leader, and this inspired other pros to join his cause.

By the late '80s, while fighting to reclaim his lost title, Carroll became the acknowledged master in Hawaii. His ascendancy at Pipeline, from finalist in his first attempt in 1979 to the first three-time Pipe Masters champion, bridged the gap between Gerry Lopez and Kelly Slater. His first win, in 1987, was driven by pure emotion the day after his sister died in an auto accident. In 1991, in perfect 8- to 12-foot surf, he executed the most committed late drop and the heaviest under-the-lip snap in history to stamp his supremacy on the wave. Carroll's performances were equally dominant at Sunset, Haleiwa, Rockpile and later along Hawaii's outer reefs.



Throughout his career, injuries have kept him from full potential. Beginning with an infected fin gash in Bali in 1978, he has been plagued: stomach rupture in 1979, knee reconstruction in 1981, fin up the butt in 1988, multiple ankle ligament tears, various cuts, lower-back strains and a concussion in 1996. His strict training regimen on tour saved his career several times.

In 1988, when he appeared set to reclaim his crown, Carroll earned surfing's first million-dollar contract with longtime backer Quiksilver. A careless paddling interference at Pipe cost him the title and caused a step back. The tour was a serious grind in the '80s, with more than twice the number of events today, and Carroll persevered through the guts of it. He married longtime girlfriend Lisa in 1991 and, at age 30, returned to third in the world ratings before leaving competition in 1993.

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