

# s rfer

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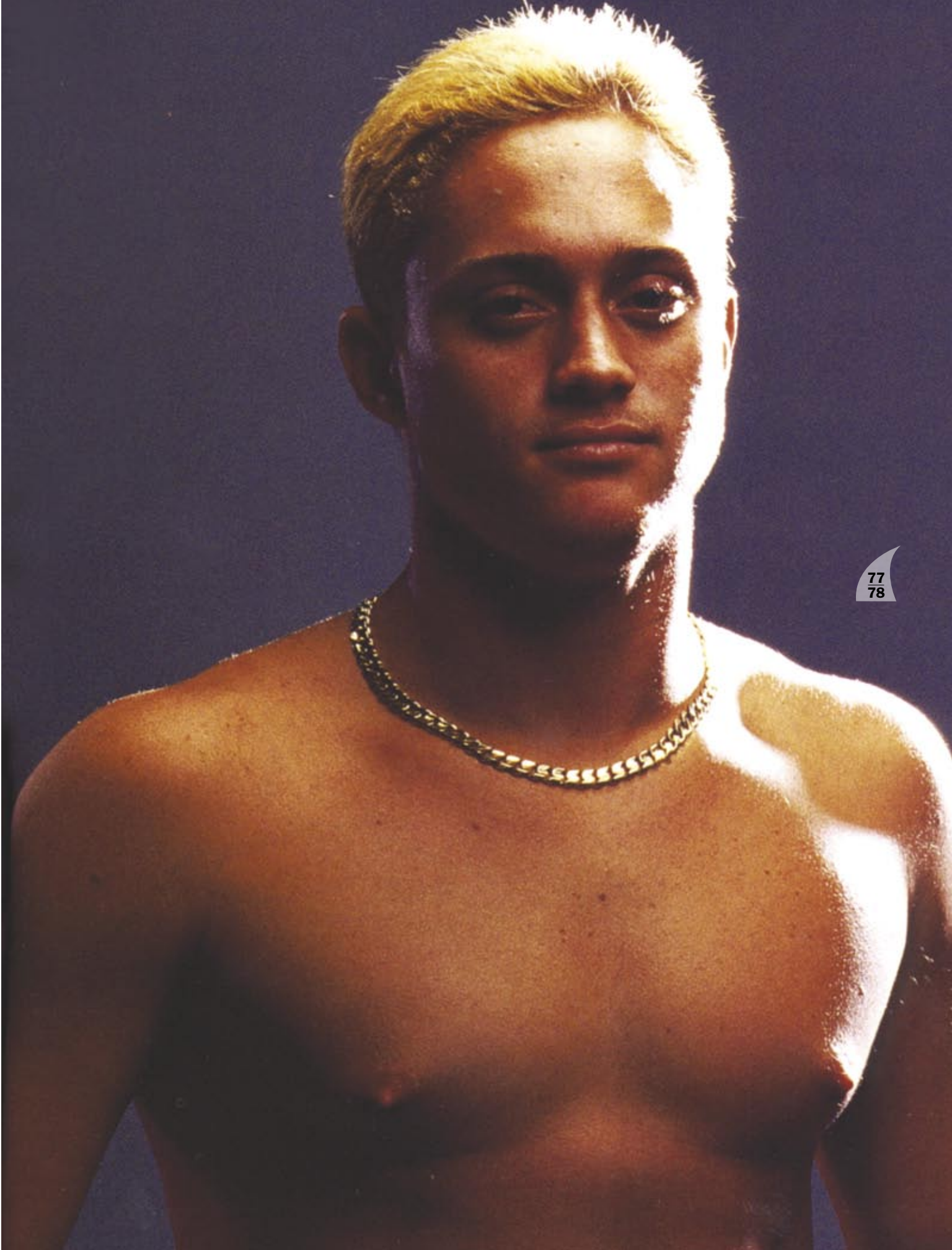
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# Makua Rothman

words by Brad Melekian photos by John Bilderback



**Growing up on Oahu's North Shore is tough. Growing up the son of a prominent father on the North Shore is even tougher, the privilege often clashing with the need to pull away and establish one's own identity. Life for Makua Rothman changed when he let go of the rope on November 23, 2002. During one of the most historic big-wave sessions in history.**

The respect only grew this winter when Makua (a previous winner of "Breakthrough Performer of the Year" and number four on it's '03 "Hot 100" list) won the Rip Curl Pro Expression Session's best barrel at Sunset Beach, and invitations to both the Pipeline Masters Trials and the Quiksilver in Memory of Eddie Aikau big wave contest at Waimea Bay.

The son of Da Hui founder Eddie Rothman, until this point Makua's life has been lived largely in the shadow of his father. But now, at 19, Makua is emerging by strides, poised to actualize himself as one of the promising watermen.

One day in December, after a harrowing bounce off the bottom at Backdoor that Makua momentarily thought had paralyzed him, he sat down on his father's couch, where, amid phone calls checking in on his health, and under the glaring lights of an MTV reality show camera crew, Makua discussed life to this point. And what's still to come.

– Brad Melekian

**People call the day that you got your wave at the best big wave session in history. You got the best wave of the day and won the Billabong XXL Big Wave Award. What did it mean to be the youngest person out there and get the biggest wave?**

It feels just like a regular day to me. Because all that hype is just politics, brah. I don't really

like being hyped up by all kinds of people. I just want to be myself and do what I do-surf. Cruise with you guys, go on boat trips, have a good time. But it happened and it feels good because I got a bunch of exposure.

**How big of a role does big wave riding play in your surfing?**

Now, since I caught that big wave, I guess it's going to play a lot because guys are going to be after me. Or after my wave.

**Does that inspire you?**

Oh, yeah. Cause I always want to catch a bigger one. I just go day by day. If the waves are small I surf, if the waves are big, I'm out there. But yeah, big wave surfing is definitely something I've always been into.

**What initially drew you into big wave surfing?**

When I was a little kid, I was kind of fat, and I couldn't get enough speed on the smaller waves, so I was over small waves. I always had Sunset, Pipe and V-Land and stuff like that, so ever since I was young I just wanted to surf bigger waves.

**What was your single most fearful moment in the water?**

Probably yesterday. Backdoor. I took off on a nice sized wave. As I was going down my board went to the side and I missed my whole board as I was dropping in. I went to curl up into a little ball just in case I hit the reef, but the lip landed on my shoulders and piledrived my knee straight into the reef, and jammed my hip and smashed it in and knocked all the

photo by tom service  
Makua setting for the \$66,000  
wave at Peahi, November 2002





photo by robert zen  
Rothman in the Perfect Blacks

**“You can’t really think of that stuff happening because that’s when you hesitate and that’s when it happens. Once you start hesitating and not committing all the way.”**

wind out of me. Both my legs and my right arm went numb, I couldn’t swim—only my left arm was working. All the air got knocked out of me, and I couldn’t say nothing, I barely got a yell out. Luckily Shane Dorian was right there, and Ian Walsh and a couple of guys were there and they got me into the beach, and put me on Dorian’s surfboard and picked me up.

**Did you think you were in serious trouble?**

Yeah, I thought I was going to drown because only one arm was working and there were sets coming, and I couldn’t breathe and I didn’t know if anybody’d seen me. I didn’t know if anyone would help me out. So that was probably one of my scariest moments.

**Is that fear always in the back of your mind when you surf spots like Peahi, Pipeline, Sunset?**

You can’t really think of that stuff happening because that’s when you hesitate and that’s when it happens. Once you start hesitating and not committing all the way that’s when you start getting hurt.

**Has the thought of dying ever crossed your mind?**

No. I know that when I die it ain’t gonna hurt.

**The North Shore is an intense backyard.**

**Have you ever felt in over your head?**

**You were invited to the Pipe Masters this year, but you’ve hurt yourself to the point where you can barely walk. Are you going to surf in the contest?**