

TOOK TIME TO DEVELOP THE KAHANAMOKU KICK

How the Hawaiian Swimmer, Aided by American Coaching, Added to His Crude Native Power a Wonderfully Effective Style.

Nature evidently designed Duke P. Kahanamoku of the Hai Nalu, (Honolulu Boat Club,) Honolulu, Hawaii, for a swimmer. In all the world today there is not a man who can boast the short distance swimming records credited to the bronze islander.

Of course a native Hawaiian, with a natural inclination toward the water, and a boyhood passed largely in that element, has a marked advantage. Yet the Duke (this is a given name, not a title,) was only a crude, green swimming phenomenon when he first attained prominence five years ago by equalling the then existing world's record for 100 yards of 55 2-5 seconds, made by the champion of the past, Charles M. Daniels of New York.

Kahanamoku, according to some experts, is today the most perfect performer in style in any branch of athletics, whether it be rowing, running, tennis, golf, or any other branch. His form appears flawless. His mode of progression in the water has brought him the appellation of "the human fish." Water for him has slight resisting force.

Duke is a smooth, well-oiled machine while in action. He has no energy-wasting movements.

The Hawaiian, with the ability to swim, possesses also a splendid physique, and the 6 feet 1/2 inch of lighthness which he possesses is no small aid to him in his chosen sport. As a matter of fact, it led definitely to his being crowned world's champion at 100 meters in the Olympic games at Stockholm in 1912.

Had Power, but No Form Whatever.

Four years ago Kahanamoku came to this country devoid of knowledge of even the rudimentary principles of speed swimming. He had ability in the rough, every observer was compelled to admit after seeing him compete, but he was totally in the dark when it came to the finer points of aquatic. Yet just a year after his arrival here, Kahanamoku was hailed as the most finished product ever turned out in swimming, and his style made other swimmers envious.

Duke was "made in America" and by Americans. He learned all he knows about the art of swimming right here in the East, and it was here that he developed the now famous "Kahanamoku kick," which many regard as the foundation of his success. In no small measure can his record-breaking performances of the past four years be attributed to this peculiar scissors movement of the legs, which precludes splashing and makes for speed with the least possible exertion. The sturdy Hawaiian revolutionized speed swimming in becoming the first champion ever to use a leg motion totally independent of his arm action. There is rhythm and evenness to Duke's strokes, but never do the two motions conflict.

It was a tedious task developing Kahanamoku's swimming prowess, but his instructors were patient and Duke was an apt and untiring pupil.

On the whole the stroke used by Kahanamoku is a typically American "crawl," perfected to such an unsurpassable degree that it has made Duke practically unbeatable over his favorite distances, from 50 to 200 yards.

Gives Credit to "Kahanamoku Kick."

There are certain features of Kahanamoku's method of propelling himself through the water that are possessed by no other natator in the world. An Australian expert who saw the Hawaiian win the 100-yard championship of New South Wales last year in the world's record time of 54 3-5 seconds, attributed his success to the "Kahanamoku kick," a term which originated in Australia. This expert predicted that in time Kahanamoku's style would make obsolete the Australian crawl, for it induced faster swimming, was less trying on the physique and when perfected was an apparently flawless mode of aquatic locomotion.

It had been contended, the Australian said, ever since Dick Cavill, one of the brightest aquatic stars ever turned out in Australia, first introduced the "crawl" in swimming, that the leg work did not materially assist the pace of the swimmer except in keeping the body well balanced in the water and thus minimizing the retarding effects due to the legs and feet sinking. This theory was quickly upset by Kahanamoku, however, who would be far less speedy were he unable to command the remarkable use of his legs that he does.

Duke is the only one of the great sprint swimmers who keeps his head out of the water while in action. He does not plough through a pool or in open water with his head buried deeply and wholly oblivious to what is going on around him. Instead, he holds the head erect and thereby gains a distinct advantage over his rivals by being able to follow their progress and gauge his own pace thereby. It is the extraordinary buoyancy of the Hawaiian that permits him to swim high. Most swimmers would not profit by such a position Duke maintains because they lack his buoyancy, and their legs would sink and cause a drag.

Feet and Arms Move Independently.

There is no dragging in Kahanamoku's style. He hits the water cleanly every time, and it rarely occurs that he is found churning it noticeably. In the form affected by the Hawaiian, the rapid movement of the feet is independent of his arm motion, this being his most important deviation from the common "crawl" stroke which American swimmers practice. The slow, easy movements of Kahanamoku from the hips to the tips of the fingers are markedly in contrast with those of all the men who have competed against him in his important races.

Australians, who have always been regarded as leaders in natorial science, attribute much of Kahanamoku's success to the fact that he keeps his head above water. In the antipodes, as well as in this country, swimming instructors invariably advise their charges to swim with the head low, so that the legs

will float near the surface, and this has been followed by injunctions to work the arms and legs in unison and to roll the body slightly from side to side so that from the hips up it should assist the arms and make breathing easier. But all these requirements are now met, the Australians point out, by the Kahanamoku, or independent, kick. The Duke's leg action serves all the purposes of the crawl and demands less exertion of the muscles than any other method of water locomotion ever evolved.

The Duke's stroke is so slow that Australians believed he was "stalling" and not trying when he created his world's record in the 100-yard championship of New South Wales. They were astounded when they learned that the Hawaiian had established a new record, for they had been fooled by the easy precision of his form, which was much cleaner than that of even their star performers.

It was at this stage that Australians first admitted that the Duke was the world's greatest short-distance swimmer. They had heard of his prowess, but they were skeptical until he proved before their very eyes that he possessed all the requirements of a champion. Americans, too, did not have much faith in the tales of Kahanamoku's ability until they saw him perform; but that is another part of the story.

Six Kicks to Each Stroke of Arms.

In Australia, Duke's performances were carefully dissected by numerous experts, who had nothing but praise for his six-beat, plain crawl. They saw him make six narrow scissor kicks, about ten inches wide and of even scope, to every full stroke of the two arms. They saw, too, that this form gave him a continuous thrash, and that his arms never attained full reach above the water. They dipped from raised-elbow position and extended under water, so that the hand was several inches below the surface before power was applied and the drive started.

Kahanamoku is a slow starter. It is, perhaps, his only fault. Once he gets under way, however, there is no heading him. It is possible that when the Hawaiian visits this country within the next two months he will be able to get away from his mark better than has been his custom, for he has had plenty of time to eradicate this disadvantage, which makes his record performances all the more remarkable.

Back of Kahanamoku is a long ancestry of semi-amphibious humans, who from the day they are born look upon the water as a natural place of existence. It may be stretching a point to say that the islanders live in the water, but they certainly do spend a great part of their existence enjoying the nautical pleasures which are theirs the year round.

Kahanamoku was born in Honolulu about twenty-five years ago, and his lullaby was the crooning of the waters in the open harbor of Honolulu, where years after he was to feature in several of the most sensational swimming performances ever recorded. Almost from the time he was able to walk Duke was a swimmer, for in the Hawaiian Islands, or the shore portions, water sports are the chief means of diversion for young and old.

A story is related about an incident in the young days of Kahanamoku which would have resulted fatally but for the remarkable swimming prowess of the native Hawaiians.

Party Swam Peacefully Ashore.

With a number of other children and their parents, Kahanamoku joined a Sunday school party which was to spend a day sailing. The schooner carrying them was an ancient affair, and when a squall arose suddenly outside of Honolulu the old ship started to careen and pitch, and eventually was thrown on its side. All the occupants were tossed into the water, yet there was not one drowned, for men, women, boys, girls, and babies paddled two miles back to shore and safety. This distance was nothing formidable to the Hawaiians, who swim as easily as they walk.

Recently another odd experience befell Kahanamoku. He was attacked by a massive eel in Honolulu Bay. Before Duke could fight off his assailant he was badly bitten on his right hand, and one finger had to be amputated to prevent poisoning. This is mild, however, when compared to the battles with sharks, of which Hawaiians tell remarkable stories.

Otto Wahle, well known as a swimming authority, who managed the American team which competed in the Olympic Games at Stockholm in 1912, believes the Duke is incomparable at this time as a sprinter. To a TIMES representative Mr. Wahle, who perhaps better than any other person in the United States knows the career of Kahanamoku, said:

When Duke First Bobbed Up Here.

"When Duke first came to this country in 1912 to try for the Olympic team he was one of the crudest and greenest swimmers I ever looked upon—I mean for a man who was supposed to possess the ability of the Hawaiian. We in this country had never heard of Duke until in 1911 he applied through the Hawaiian Association to be credited with a record of 55 2-5 seconds for 100 yards, which it was asserted he made in the tidal waters of Honolulu Harbor and which equaled the then existing world's record of Daniels. Although the application for the record was accompanied by the most complete data the Record Committee of the A. A. U. ever received before or after, we were doubtful of the performance and did not feel that we could accept such a record, made as it was by an unknown. Being established in tidal waters, we thought it possible that the tide favored Duke, notwithstanding that the Hawaiian officials asserted in affidavits that such was not the case.

"The people in power advised the Honolulu authorities to send Duke here during the early months of 1912 for the indoor championships of the A. A. U., with the statement that he would be selected for the Olympic team if he could show the form which his world's record performance in 1911 warranted. "The Hawaiians jumped at this opportunity to exploit their 'sensation,' and Duke made his first appearance in the United States in the 220-yard championship at Pittsburgh in the Winter of 1912. His initial race immediately indicated that he was a man of exceptional ability, although he did not win. He was an absolutely crude swimmer and knew nothing whatever about tank swimming. He competed in the same heat with Perry McGillivray of the Illinois A. C., who was, and still is, one of the fastest swimmers in the United States.

"Everybody was astonished to see Duke lead by six yards in sixty yards. However, owing to poor judgment of pace, he was so exhausted at 120 yards that he had to be pulled out of the water. He profited greatly by this experience, and a few days later in Chicago won the 100-yard title, although his ignorance of the turns was a great handicap to the Hawaiian. In a fifty-yard title race in Chicago Duke went unplaced because of his poor start and bad turning.

"The A. A. U. authorities were convinced of Kahanamoku's ability and decided to award him the 100-yard open water record, and also rewarded him with a place on the United States Olympic team. Being assured of this berth, Kahanamoku came east to Philadelphia, and during his stay there he received rudimentary instructions in the pool of the University of Pennsylvania. His stroke was so crude and his starting and turning so defective that a good deal of pains had to be taken before he started to develop his present style.

"Then came the trip to Stockholm on board the Finland, on which a temporary pool was rigged up. All of the swimming members of the team took turns in coaching Duke (Mr. Wahle modestly refrained from stating that he himself had much to do with eliminating the weaknesses of Kahanamoku's style,) and by the time we reached Stockholm, while still a diamond in the rough, Duke was a much improved swimmer.

A Bit Slow in Getting Under Way.

"Still, he continued to start slowly, and his arm work was anything but clean. He always hit the water when bringing his arms forward, instead of completing the motion cleanly. During his stay in Stockholm, however, the progress made by Duke made us all marvel. He profited more by his sojourn in the Swedish capital than at any other period of his career.

"When he left Stockholm he swam with a typically American crawl stroke, using extremely fast leg work, which some natorial mathematicians account to be a six-beat stroke. By this I mean there were six leg kicks to every double arm stroke. It is certain Duke never counted his strokes. Like all good swimmers, he now uses a slower leg kick for distance swimming than for sprint racing. He swims with extended arms, with his head thrown back, and he rolls very little. His arms are thrown forward from the shoulder with exceptionally great force.

"According to some experts, the "Kahanamoku kick" originated in the fresh-water baths of the East, where a more rapid motion of the legs was necessary to overcome the less buoyant fresh water than in the salt water baths of Australia, where the crawl stroke originated. This opinion appears far-fetched, however, when one bears in mind that Kahanamoku belongs to a race of swimmers who have no superiors as swimmers and that his profess is probably instinctive rather than the result of any artificial conditions.

"In nearly all of his 100-yard races, Kahanamoku follows the pace of his opponents up to the half-way mark, and then he figuratively "walks away" from them.

"Reverting to Stockholm, I was the happiest man at the Olympic games when, in the first heat of the 100-meter championship, Kahanamoku triumphed in the world's record time of 1:02 3-5, which he reduced in the semi-final competition to 1:02 2-5, the greatest performance he had exhibited up to this date. In winning the final in 1:02 3-5, Duke defeated the noted Australian star Healy.

Too Another Slice From Record.

"After Stockholm, Kahanamoku went to Hamburg, Germany, with a team of Americans and in his very first race, the 100-meter German championship, he once more lowered the world's record, this time reducing it to 1:01 3-5. This made the third time within a month that the Hawaiian had bettered the figures for this distance. He also swam on the United States relay teams which defeated the German representatives in 400-yard and 440-meter races.

"Then he returned to the United States in the Fall of 1912 and was not heard from again until the following year, when he brought the 100-yard straightaway record for tidal waters down to 54 4-5 seconds. In 1914 he made a trip to San Francisco with the Hui Nalu team and defeated Rathel of the Illinois A. C. in a 100-yard race, and once more he cut a fifth of a second off the world's record for the distance. The race took place in the 75-yard tank of the Suro baths. He followed up this feat by making a record of 2:20 4-5 for 220 yards, when he won by a touch from Perry McGillivray. Then to demonstrate his versatility he swam a half mile without special preparation in 11:40 2-5, finishing second to Ludy Langer, the Los Angeles crack.

"In January of 1915, accompanied by George Cunha, Duke visited Australia. In his initial start he won the 100-yard title of New South Wales and

created a sensation by slicing four-fifths of a second off the straightaway record for the "century," cutting the figures to 0:53 4-5. Cunha finished second in 0:55 1-5, and Alfred Barry, the Australian champion and recordholder, took third in 0:56 1-5. Kahanamoku also won the 220-yard championship, but his time of 2:32 2-5 was nothing exceptional. In a 440-yard race the Hawaiian suffered the only defeat of his stay in Australia, which lasted until March. He was beaten by T. Adrian of Sydney.

"His Great Performance at St. Kilda. "It was in St. Kilda that Duke gave one of his most extraordinary performances, when, under adverse conditions, he swam 100 metres in 1:01 3-5, equaling his previous world's record for the distance. From St. Kilda he went to Newcastle, where, in a 50-yard bath, he swam 150 yards in 1:32, but because of technicalities he never received credit for the mark.

"On his return to Honolulu Kahanamoku won the Hawaiian Association 100-yard title, and made the still existing world's record of 53 1-5 seconds. No one could doubt that Duke's performance was legitimate, for any man who could do 53 4-5 in a foreign country should do much better in his home waters. The figures were accepted by the Amateur Athletic Union without question.

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"There is one thing I will always admire about Kahanamoku. He is a great swimmer, but he is even higher in my esteem as a gentleman. On the trip to Stockholm in 1912 he rendered every assistance to the Olympic Committee, proved a modest, retiring sort of fellow, and attracted everybody to him through his good nature. His smile became famous among us, for it was golden if ever a smile was. Duke is a striking personality, and even now I can see him lined up at the start ready to dart into the water. His long, shining black hair and his copper-colored skin blend in harmony, and altogether he would make a model worthy of any sculptor's chisel."

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"There is one thing I will always admire about Kahanamoku. He is a great swimmer, but he is even higher in my esteem as a gentleman. On the trip to Stockholm in 1912 he rendered every assistance to the Olympic Committee, proved a modest, retiring sort of fellow, and attracted everybody to him through his good nature. His smile became famous among us, for it was golden if ever a smile was. Duke is a striking personality, and even now I can see him lined up at the start ready to dart into the water. His long, shining black hair and his copper-colored skin blend in harmony, and altogether he would make a model worthy of any sculptor's chisel."

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