

"Duke" Paoa Becomes "King"

Twenty Years Ago He Reigned Unchallenged In His Kingdom of Water and Has Come Out of His Five-Year Retirement and Ascended His Old Throne to Reign Again as the Greatest Amateur Swimmer In the World

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DUKE PAOA KAHANAMOKU is not really a duke, though he does come from a good Hawaiian family. His father was captain of the Royal Guard in the old dynasty, while his brothers are leaders among the "beach boys" at Waikiki.

But, even though he has inherited no title, Duke Kahanamoku is a king just the same, a king of the water, by the power of his great arms and the rhythmical kick of his sturdy legs. Now and then Duke has vacated his throne for a time, but he has always been able to ascend it again. Twenty years ago he was the fastest amateur swimmer in the world. Today he holds the same distinction.

Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Bobby Jones, Bill Tilden—these are names to conjure with in the world of sport, and each has been a champion for a long time. Ruth first sprang into greatness at the close of the war. So did Dempsey and Tilden. Jones followed closely on their heels.

But Kahanamoku was a champion when Jones had not yet received his first sawed-off iron; and he had a running start of almost ten years on Ruth, Tilden and Dempsey. Duke broke records before 1910; and he is still breaking them in 1929!

Recently at the New York Athletic club, during the annual national swimming championships, those three wise men of the water, Bill Bachrach, Norman Ross and Johnny Weissmuller, all of the Illinois Athletic club, were talking about the greatest amateur swimmers of today. Some one had suggested the newly crowned 100-yard victor, Walter Laufer, of Chicago, as the logical man to take the place vacated by Weissmuller when the latter turned professional; another had named Walter Spence, and a third had nominated George Kojac.

But Bachrach, Ross and Weissmuller smiled and shook their heads.

The man they named as champion of champions is Duke Paoa Kahanamoku. And their opinion is worth something. For Bill Bachrach, though he may be getting rounder with the years, has long been one of our greatest coaches; Norman Ross was the greatest amateur distance swimmer of his time, and Johnny Weissmuller has set more records than any other man who ever lived.

Sometimes the judgment of coaches and athletes is colored by their prejudices. But the records support their opinions in Duke's case. In 1910 Kahanamoku swam fifty yards in 23 seconds over a short course in Honolulu. That record stood for thirteen years until Duke himself lowered it to 22 3-5 seconds in Los Angeles on April 26, 1923. Even the great Weissmuller at his best was never able to break this mark, and the best time he officially scored was 22 4-5 seconds on January 8, 1925. This time Duke Kahanamoku equalled in February of this year. Over a period of virtually twenty years, the giant Hawaiian has led the world in speed swimming, and today he stands without a peer.

Duke has other records to his credit. No man has ever covered seventy-five yards in as good time as he established August 6, 1913, in San Francisco, when he raced through the water in 37 2-5 seconds. Nor have such outstanding stars as Ludy Langer, Norman Ross and Johnny Weissmuller ever made as good time in 120 yards as Duke established in New York in 1918 when he was officially clocked in 1 minute 7 2-5 seconds. And no man has been as consistent over the 100-yard distance as this same Duke. He has been blocked in better than 55 seconds more than one hundred times, over a period of twenty years. From that day at Stockholm back in the



Johnny Weissmuller (left) and the Duke

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Olympic Games of 1912 when he slashed his way through 100 meters of fresh water in faster time than any other man had ever made before, the name of Duke Paoa Kahanamoku has been a household word throughout America. Following that victory he returned to Hawaii. He was welcomed as the hero of his people and a great public reception was held for him in Honolulu.

There, under the statue of old King Kamehameha, he was accorded such honors as used to be bestowed upon winners of the laurel wreath in ancient Greece. While the ceremonies were in progress, a native noticed the striking resemblance which the young Olympic hero bore to the great king who had been known as the Napoleon of the Pacific. The broad forehead, the intelligent, wide-set eyes, the forceful nose and the strong chin were common to both, and the youthful Kahanamoku possessed the same Herculean tapering body.

And then was recalled the prediction which old King Kamehameha had made on his deathbed. This monarch who had united all the warring tribes of the Pacific into one powerful nation had prophesied: "Some day my people will lose their freedom and their nationality. Some day they will be supplanted in their own islands and sickness will spread among them and their strength will pass away. But before they are entirely gone there will come one in my image who shall have within himself all the glorious strength of a dying race,

and he shall be honored throughout the world, and he shall bring fame to my people."

That prediction, though it had been handed down from generation to generation, had almost been forgotten. The natives thought King Kamehameha's prophecy envisioned a great warrior, and they knew the time had long past when a general could bring back the glory that had died with King Kam.

But the startling resemblance of Kahanamoku to the national hero convinced the Hawaiians that Duke was the hero of the ancient prophecy and was King of the Water, as Kamehameha had been King of the Islands. Legend said that the one who fulfilled King Kam's prophecy would be able to handle the royal outrigger alone and unaided, as the great warrior of the past had done. An exact replica of the boat which King Kam had manned was brought forth. Ordinarily, four Hawaiians were barely able to launch it. Duke manned it alone. And then he rode upon the ancient surfboard that only King Kamehameha had been strong enough to guide.

So the prophecy was fulfilled to the satisfaction of the natives of Maui, who made the youthful Kahanamoku their perpetual hero.

From 1912 to 1919 the Duke reigned supreme as old King Kam had reigned before him. But his kingdom was the water, and he reigned by virtue of the fact that he was the greatest swimmer who ever lived. He developed with the years, his strength increasing and his stroke improving.

Meanwhile, on the Pacific coast, a new champion had arisen. His name was Norman Ross, and he was known as "The Big Moose." He was even larger than Duke Kahanamoku and he possessed unlimited stamina and great determination. He was good in the dashes and superb in the distances.

In 1919 he represented the United States in the Inter-allied Games, scoring more points than all the rest of the American team together. He could have defeated the rest of the world single-handed. He won every race in which he was entered from the 100 to 1,500 meters, and later he won the Seine ten-mile race against the best distance swimmers of Europe, winning by almost a mile.

He followed these triumphs with a world tour, shattering records everywhere he went. He arrived in Honolulu in the fall of 1919 and at once challenged Duke Kahanamoku to race him 220 yards for the world's championship.

The distance Ross selected was a shrewd choice. "The Big Moose" knew that he had but little chance of defeating the famous Hawaiian in his own specialty. And he knew that Duke could not swim much beyond 100 yards, while he himself was a distance champion.

His suggestion of 220 yards appeared at first to be a satisfactory compromise, as it would apparently favor a sprinter as much as it would a man who was at his best in the quarter-mile. People immediately said that Ross had suggested a race which would come very close to settling the world's swimming supremacy. But, as a matter of fact, the odds were all against Duke. For it was easy enough for Ross to cut down his distance, but it looked like an impossible task for Duke to build up within short notice to more than twice his favorite swim.

Duke Kahanamoku realized that it was not a fair test and one day Honolulu awoke to find him gone. He had disappeared suddenly and completely. A long search was conducted for him, and at last he was discovered living alone in a nook of one of the smaller islands. The Hawaiians were sure that their hero could defeat Ross and they insisted that he would have to come back and meet this giant challenger for the honor of the islands. Duke steadfastly refused. Like Achilles he would not go to battle.

Then Dad Center, who had always been his friend and adviser and a great coach as well, made a special trip to the isolated island. He had a long talk with the champion. He told him that he would have to swim Ross, win or lose.

To arouse Duke's interest Dad asked him how he would race "The Big Moose" providing they did meet. Duke replied that there was only one way he could see—to swim as hard as he could for as far as he could and trust to Providence that he would be able to finish in front.

"You are whipped if you try it," said Dad Center. "That is just what Ross and everyone else expects. Now I know a way you can win the 220."

And the plan that Dad unfolded intrigued the giant Hawaiian into returning to Honolulu for the match.

The day of the race the greatest crowd that ever attended an athletic event in the islands was on hand to see their champion defeat Norman Ross. The natives were sure Duke would win. But the experts did not concede him a chance.

At the crack of the pistol Ross was out in front, and he held the lead for the first hundred yards—held it unwillingly, for he was trying in every possible way to get

Again After Long Retirement

Soothed Frenzied Nerves of "Prospective Champions" By Chanting Melodious Songs of His Native Land to Accompaniment of His Hawaiian Guitar

morning in 1922 coming out to meet our ship as she headed for the harbor of Honolulu. Before that day was ended I was back again on a surfboard with him, speeding toward the sands of Waikiki, and, of course, I was there to root for him in the Olympic 100 meters at Antwerp and at Paris.

I have tried to write an impersonal story about Duke Kahanamoku that the reader may not get the impression that I have allowed myself to be carried away about a man who should be long past his prime. So I have merely outlined his history, leaving you to read between the lines and imagine how much I wish as one veteran to another that the work he is doing now may not be in vain.

Duke was not quite ready for the national championships in April. A motion picture he was working in cut into his training schedule. But the Duke plans a series of races and exhibitions throughout the country this summer, and he expects to meet Kojac, Laufer and Spence over his favorite distance.

And the three wise men of the water—Bachrach, Ross and Weissmuller—say that he will defeat whomever he meets and that right now he is still the greatest amateur of them all.

So even if he isn't really a duke he is still a king.

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Kahanamoku to pass him. But the Duke stroked smoothly at Ross' shoulder and refused to go by. Ross realized that the Hawaiian had outsmarted him and was playing a waiting game. So "The Big Moose" churned the water for the second hundred yards, trying to draw away and wear down the Duke. But Kahanamoku, still fresh after the easy pace of the first hundred, held his own and took the final turn with 20 yards to go, on even terms. Then Kahanamoku sprinted as only he can sprint—and won by a full yard from the man against whom he was not given a ghost of a show.

As Kahanamoku crossed beneath the rope, the pool was covered by a shower of straw hats and panamas and twenty thousand raving rooters announced to the world that the Duke was still King.

The following year in the Olympics at Antwerp, Kahanamoku again won the hundred meters, and again defeated Norman Ross. The latter captured the 400-meter crown, but he was not entirely satisfied. He wanted to conquer the man who had outfoxed him.

He was walking along the Chicago water front one day when his attention was attracted by the swimming of a youth. Possibly in his mind, even then, was the thought that though he could not defeat Duke Kahanamoku himself, he had found the man who might some day achieve that distinction. So Ross took his protege to the Illinois Athletic club and put him under the watchful eyes of Coach Bachrach. The youth quickly became a champion, and at seventeen was a world's record holder with the scalp of every great champion, except Kahanamoku, dangling at his belt. The name of this new star who was soon to be hailed as the "human fish" was Johnny Weissmuller.

In the spring of 1922 Johnny made a special trip to the Hawaiian Islands for the purpose of racing Duke. Soon after Johnny's ship drew into dock the people of Honolulu threw farewell lais to Duke and watched him sail down the harbor for California. As the last misty outline of Diamond Head faded away Kahanamoku knew that he had left behind him his own land which he never expected to call home again.

Some people probably thought that Duke was leaving because he did not want to swim the brilliant Weissmuller. Possibly that did have some thing to do with his decision. But there was a more important reason. Duke was already in his thirties. He could not keep on swimming forever. He had no profession. An offer had been made to him to portray King Kamehameha in a Hawaiian picture to be produced in Hollywood. He felt that this presented an opportunity he could not refuse. That picture did not materialize, but there were others which did, and Duke continued to make his home in Southern California.

His lifelong love for the water was still a part of him. He often went swimming at Santa Monica. He kept himself in splendid condition and now and then he swam an exhibition race.

In the spring of 1924, the Los Angeles Athletic club wanted him to try out for the American Olympic team again. No sprint swimmer had ever been a member of three Olympic teams, and though Duke had spanned eight years by winning at both Stockholm in 1912 and Antwerp in 1920, it was considered virtually impossible for him to compete successfully against the younger generation. But within a few weeks Duke was swimming as well as ever and he made the team with flying colors.

At Paris, in the finals against Johnny Weissmuller, the super-swimmer of modern times, he fought a great and courageous battle and he was beaten by less than a yard in world record-breaking time. It was the fastest 100 meters that Duke had ever swum and at that time he had been in active competition for more than fourteen years. If Johnny had been facing the Duke in 1912 it is doubtful indeed that even Weissmuller's own original style would have carried him to victory against Kahanamoku's Hawaiian crawl.

Duke was disappointed. Despite the fact that he had done something no other swimmer had ever done in making three Olympic teams, Kahanamoku was downcast. For he had been beaten. It was to be expected, and he had lost only after a game fight in time that was faster than any man had ever made. Nevertheless, it was defeat, and Duke retired.

Now and then he swam in local western meets. Now and then he flashed something of that speed which had made him the greatest of all the swimming marvels. But for the most part he swam for his own pleasure and because he still loved the water.

Shortly before the Olympic games of 1923 Duke decided to turn professional. He was engaged for a vaudeville act. This did not last long enough for Duke to make any money from the venture, and inasmuch as he had not violated the amateur code, he was finally reinstated. He did not try out for the 1928 Olympic team. He could have made it. No one questioned that. But Duke Kahanamoku within a few months of forty was not considered in the same class with the Kahanamoku of twenty. And therein the critics were wrong. For it was only the incentive that was lacking. The speed, the stamina and the love of the game were still there.

This was proved early this year. For just as soon as Johnny Weissmuller retired from amateur ranks Duke Kahanamoku commenced training again. He went back to his old methods of lazily swimming long distances, interspersed with occasional flashes of speed. He built himself up and

within a few weeks he had cut his time from a minute to 55 seconds for the 100 and by the middle of March he was clipping off 53 seconds without great effort.

I like to think about old Duke in training again. He means something more to me than just another champion. As a youngster of twelve I rode on his surfboard with him when he made an exhibition tour of the California beaches after the Olympic games of 1912. As a carefree member of that most colorful Olympic team that ever put to sea—the team that sailed for Antwerp in the early summer of 1920—I remember the Duke, already a veteran, quiet, dignified, and yet with a smile for all of us, who were generally in an uproar against something or other.

In the evening Duke would get out his guitar and chant the melodious songs of the islands, helping us to free our minds from the strain of the approaching Olympic championships.

I recall the Duke on a bright March



Duke Kahanamoku Is a King of the Water, by the Power of His Great Arms and the Rhythmical Kick of His Sturdy Legs