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Headstrong winds, swells highlight annual Goya Windsurfing Festival

By BROOKE WRIGHT

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Camille Juban flies high off a wave during the final heat of the first round of the men's pro division at the American Windsurfing Tour's Goya Windsurfing Festival at Waddell Creek on Thursday. (Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel)

DAVENPORT – Sneezing from pollen and getting blown around by 45 mph wind gusts may not spell perfect conditions to most outdoor enthusiasts. But at least some enjoy the springtime weather with its northwest winds and wind swell: windsurfers.

So it stands to reason the American Windsurfing Tour kicked off its season at Waddell Beach Thursday.

The Goya Windsurfing Festival, the first event of six in the tour, kicked off with contestable head-high waves and 30 mph side-shore winds.

Pros from as far as Argentina – such as the title sponsor Francisco Goya – joined amateurs, masters and juniors for a day of wave-sailing. Despite the lack of shelter for spectators, the parking lot was nearly full on both sides of Highway 1 for the event's launch at what competitor Kai Katchadourian calls one of the premier shore breaks in North America.

"It's in the middle of the northwest-wind machine and has a really good sandbar," Katchadourian said of Waddell Beach, adding that it's even better when the south swells kick in alongside the northwest winds, like it did at last year's contest. "That's the element that makes Waddell world class."

Katchadourian, originally from Palo Alto, learned to wave sail at Waddell Beach before moving to Maui at age 16. The 26-year veteran windsurfer still comes back for those summer south swells and northwest winds, a combination that makes the journey worthwhile, and not just for him.

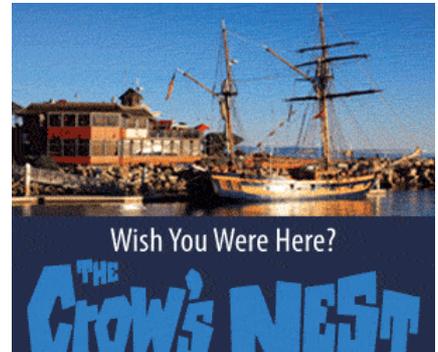
"A lot of

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people from Maui are in the event because it extends the season," Katchadourian said, adding that Maui is protected from the northwest-wind swells.

Although there is no south swell this time around, the strong-side shore wind and locally generated northwest-wind swell is enough to send competitors sailing along the choppy line of a breaking wave before



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they turn around again to jump the waves, garnering massive points for back loops, 360s and double-forward loops, to name a few.

Tour director Sam Bittner created the AWT three years ago as a stepping stone for aspiring professionals to develop before tackling the Professional Windsurfers Association tour. The strategy may be working.

"The level has skyrocketed," Katchadourian said. "The top sailors can come in here and do what they do for the younger guys,"

He added that the mix of competitors and inspiration it creates is "second to none."

Bittner, whose first competition was two years ago, got a one-way ticket to Maui in 2008 from her hometown Seattle and decided she wanted to see more events for developing competitors. So she organized one.

"Now it's hard to find time," Bittner said, now tour director and event organizer for eight events in



Pro Japanese windsurfer Miho Tanaka goes upside down during Thursday's competition at Waddell Creek. (Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel)

2013 alone. But she found time to suit up and compete Thursday against rising star Fiona Wylde and four other women, including defending champion Ingrid Larouche.

One of the highlights of the event is the mix of levels and ages. Fiona Wylde, 16, is the youngest participant competing in the women's, juniors and amateurs events, a sign of enthusiasm apparent in her father Macrae Wylde, who is competing in the amateur and masters events.

"It's more time in the water," Wylde said.

Wylde, from Hood River, Ore, grew up windsurfing with both parents on the Columbia Gorge, where wind traveling one way hits currents in the opposite direction, making peaks to launch off of.

"The river is good for jumping (whereas) here it's more down the line surfing," Wylde said. "I love being out here, it's a totally different type of sailing."

Wylde's skill matches her enthusiasm, according to Bittner.

"She was our youngest when she started three years ago," Bittner said. "She kicks my (butt)."

If wind conditions continue as they are predicted to, the final pro rounds will take place Friday afternoon, with masters and juniors on Saturday.

A closing party at Davenport Surf and Sail on Sunday at 6 p.m. will end the four-day event.

IF YOU GO

Goya Windsurfing Festival

WHEN: Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 10 a.m.

WHERE: Waddell Beach Park



High winds and a consistent swell at Waddell Creek provided windsurfers with a great stop in Santa Cruz County Thursday. The competition continues through the weekend. (Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel)

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