

Inside

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SPORTS

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COMMENTARY

Shark attack won't keep ocean lover out of water

For any ocean-water person, a fatal shark attack, especially if it's in local waters, makes us all step back and take a second look at the environment that, for many of us, is a second home.

We roll the dice every time we step in the water. Things happen. Most are overwhelmingly good, which is why we are addicted to the ocean.

But now and then, bad things happen.

My deepest condolences go to the family of David Martin, who died Friday of wounds from a shark bite at Fletcher Cove in Solana Beach.

I'm primarily a surfer, but also paddle my outrigger canoe, body surf and fish in North County's coastal waters between Ponto and Swami's. I've been enjoying these waters for 40 years.

I'm also a numbers guy. Whenever I can, I want to stack the odds in my favor. I check the surf at least once a day. That's 14,600 surf checks over 40 years.

Conservatively, I surf at least 500 hours a year. That totals 20,000 hours the past four decades. I have paddled my one-man canoe another 1,000 hours the last 10 years. During that time I have never once seen a shark that could harm a human. I have also never seen a pack of eight swimmers, like the one Martin was with, 150 yards offshore.

The preliminary evidence indicates Martin was attacked by a great white shark. What caused the shark to wander into Fletcher Cove? Was it an accident, or was there purpose?

No matter the reason, it

Ocean report

Ed Machado reported on conditions at 3 p.m. Saturday:

Surf was about 1 foot, so I decided to paddle my one-man outrigger canoe from Beacon's to Moonlight. A dozen surfers, mostly longboarders, were out at Beacon's. Only a handful were at normally crowded "D" Street near Moonlight. I spotted one large, purple and white jellyfish off Stonesteps. Two pods of dolphins were inshore. One north of Stonesteps was feeding aggressively near shore, chasing lots of bait fish. Where there are small bait fish, the foodchain pyramids nearby. The water was extremely murky, a residual to what appears to be the beginning of a red tide. The last fatal shark attack in Hawaii occurred off the west coast of Maui a couple of springs ago. The surfer was hit in the morning in murky water, the result of a recent heavy rainstorm. Experienced Hawaiian watermen suggest avoiding murky water in Hawaii.

won't impact my enjoyment of North County's coastal waters. There's a good chance I will have second thoughts about swimming with a group a couple hundred yards offshore, but I will continue to use the ocean the same way I have the last 40 years.

I believe the risks of a shark attack are extremely minimal in the surf off San Diego County. The last recorded fatal shark attack was in 1959. Right now is probably the safest time to use the ocean because a rare attack just occurred.

By nature, surfers are risk takers. If you are out there long enough, something is bound to occur. It's my experience that tropical and deeper waters increase your odds of an encounter.

On my honeymoon, my wife and I chartered a sailboat in French Polynesia. We were anchored in the lagoon off Huahine. Early one morning we rowed our dinghy to shore and walked up the point to get a better look at the surf. Over night it had jumped to eight feet and the pass was dealing perfect left-hand barrels.

As we watched, a 10-inch shark fin popped up just 25 yards offshore. It was a big guy, cruising directly between us and the surf spot.

My new bride asked if I was going to surf, and I said yes. She thought I was crazy and was going to become part of one of the shortest marriages of all time. I went because the surf was perfect and there was only one other guy out.

While celebrating my 40th birthday on Tavarua Island Surf Resort in Fiji, six of us went out for a late afternoon session at Cloudbreak. The surf was really small.

During a lull, a 12-inch fin surfaced less than 40 yards from us. This guy was carrying some beef. The boat driver had bailed and left to visit a nearby yacht. Cloudbreak is just a submerged reef a couple miles from shore, and we basically had nowhere to go. We all quietly put our feet up on our boards and waited.

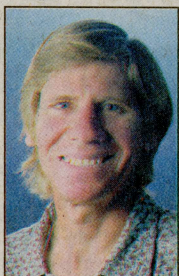
Fortunately, after a couple of minutes, the shark turned and went up the reef away from us. As a surfer, that was my scariest moment from a sea creature.

You really never know any time you step in any ocean.

Last week, a good friend of mine was staying at the swank Westin Hotel in Maui. He stepped off the beach right in front of the resort and dove into the water to cool off.

While pulling himself along the bottom less than 10 feet from shore in four feet of water, his left hand found a hole in the sand between some flat rocks. An eel in the hole got hold of his hand. He required 20 stitches in his ring finger to repair the deep gashes.

Sharks, eels, stingrays, jellyfish, stonefish — they are all part of the ocean game. Despite the risks, it's a game so many of us love to play.



ED
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