

Sand from 1B

in California to helping to create international competitions throughout the world.

Beale spoke on the history of sandboarding, the culture surrounding it, what it does and can do for the future of Florence, the globalization of the sport and his own plans to bring full sandboard manufacturing to the city.

“This is my motive: To benefit as many people as we can with what we have to offer,” Beale said. “We want to do a good job and make sure everybody has a great experience. They enjoy sandboarding and they love it. They want to turn their friends on to it. It’s healthy, it’s environmentally friendly, it’s inexpensive. There’s nothing bad to say about it.”

Beale got his first taste of sandboarding growing up in the Mojave Desert.

“We would go out there with the Boy Scouts and play on the dunes,” he said. “It was only natural that you would try and slide down with whatever you could find: old cardboard, a piece of wood, old skateboards. They didn’t work very well, but it was still fun.”

At the time, the sport of sandboarding didn’t exist. Instead, Beale got into the surf industry, along with the budding snowboarding community.

“When I first started, there was no snowboarding, it wasn’t a thing. It turned out to be a million-dollar industry. The whole time I’m thinking, ‘I wonder when someone is going to do something with this sandboarding thing, I’d sure like to see someone do something.’ And we’d go to the trade shows and look at all the surfboards and snow and such. I would just check out the booths, see if anybody had any sandboards. They didn’t. It was kind of an epiphany that, if it was going to happen, it was going to be up to me.”

So, Beale started looking at what makes a good sandboard design. He had

already been working on the concept, making his first board in 1972, which he displays at Sand Master Park. The early boards Beale and his crew made were heavy, only able to do 5 miles per hour, tops.

“My partner at the time was a nuclear physicist, a chemical engineer who worked for NASA for many years,” Beale said. “He talks about making boards on a molecular level. Don’t look at the board but look at the atoms that are interacting with each other.”

After constant reworking, the boards were able to get up to 40-50 miles per hour.

“Waxes and lubricants came into play. Over the years the design of the board got more and more maneuverable. I think that caught people’s attention. Now, it wasn’t just kids sliding down the dune that you try once. Now, it looks like snowboarding. Those guys are really moving, and they’re maneuvering well. People want to do that.”

By 1991, they were able to get into the production of the boards, producing 200-300 boards a year.

“We were selling a lot of boards out of the country, because people who wanted to sandboard — if they didn’t make their own board — there was no other place they could buy a sandboard except from us. We had a monopoly on it. So, we got a lot of attention real fast,” Beale said.

But not a ton. The clientele was still niche, catering to pockets of sandboarding enthusiasts without any real organization. Parks like Sand Master were still years away; the key to making sandboarding a worldwide sport was in the internet.

“In 1995, one of my friends said we should have a website,” Beale said. “I wasn’t real into it, more into print ads. And I didn’t really comprehend the power the internet had to spread the word. So, I got online and started looking for sandboarding. Zero hits. Nothing. I said ‘Okay, the most valuable website would be sandboard.com.’ I bought it and put the web-

site up.”

From that point on, it took off around the world. Beale found little pockets of sandboarders here in Florence — people who had been doing it for a couple of years.

“They were so excited to finally find a sandboard site. They gravitated toward us,” said Beale. “From there, it went worldwide. Now it’s just a racehorse. I can’t even keep up with what’s going on out there.”

They started demoing the boards around the country and Mexico. Car and beverage companies were contacting them to have sandboarding in their commercials.

“They were making a handful of money, and that was very attractive to the guys,” Beale said.

In 1998, ESPN was doing a festival in the Florence area and asked Beale to do a demo for sandboarding. It’s then that he found the Oregon Dunes.

“The sand here is some of the best in the world,” he said. “When the opportunity came to come up here and start a sandboard park — the first of its kind — we jumped on it.”

That was in 2000. At the time, he didn’t know if the project would be a success. The Siuslaw News did an article on him, as did the Oregonian, which he hoped would generate some interest. They put a sign on the highway hoping someone would come.

“Within 15 minutes, every board was rented,” Beale said. “We couldn’t keep enough boards in the store. For the first five seasons, we were just doubling our numbers to keep up with the demand. Now we keep about a hundred rentals in the store through the summer. That’s been a real blessing.”

A common comparison that’s made to sandboarding is snowboarding. The website Eugene Cascade Coast says about the sport, “Snowboarders, have you tried sandboarding yet? This unique, exhilarating board sport shares many of the same elements of snowboarding and surfing, but instead of snow or waves

— all you need is sand!”

In actuality, sandboarding is more aligned with surfing.

One big difference lies in the time it takes for each specific ride. Snowboarders are used to traversing areas that are 10,000 feet in height, allowing for longer rides and requiring different skill sets. But the dunes in Florence are only a few hundred feet in height.

“You’re not going to get a long run,” Beale said. “If you are bombing it, you can probably get a minute, minute and a half on a run. If you’re actually traversing, you get more time.”

Because of that difference, surfing, with its four- to 10-second runs, is a more apt comparison.

“And just like surfing, every ride in, they paddle out. Well for us, every ride down, we hike back up,”

said Beale.

And the culture is more aligned to surfing as well.

“You’re out there in the sun and a lot of the dunes are by the beach, the waves are there. You kind of have that whole ‘one-with-nature’ attitude out there, where in snow, you’re all bundled up. We don’t need to protect ourselves from the kind of temperatures. We just go out in our shorts, barefoot with a T-shirt. It’s very pleasant.”

But the one way that sandboarding differs from surfing is the lack of interest in competition. While snowboarding has become an Olympic sport, and surfing competitions have become a mainstay throughout the Pacific Ocean shorelines, sandboarders just don’t seem interested.

At first, it appeared the

reason was the sport wasn’t mature enough. Twenty-five years ago, alt sports organization X-Games contacted Beale about adding sandboarding to the lineup.

“We said, that’s wonderful, but the sports not there yet. Most of the people couldn’t even find a sandboard. This was back in the early days. Where would you even find these athletes? We didn’t know how long it was going to take, because we weren’t out there yet.”

The sport did grow, but there were distinct cultures surrounding it. In South America, sandboarding competition is booming.

(Editor’s Note: In Part II this Wednesday, the exponential growth of the sport in South America and, most recently, Saudi Arabia.)

Little from 1B

had just bought a new 175 Honda off/on road motorcycle. Two of my football players asked if I wanted to go riding.

My thought? “I bet I can keep up with these two.”

We left my house in Spray, Ore., around 9 a.m. We got back several hours later. My new bike had a busted tail light, a bent front fender and a motorcycle that no longer looked new. That’s because, as we raced down a dirt road, I lost a bet as to who could stop first. My bike stopped; I did not.

They won.

In the spring of 1976, my common sense must have been hibernating. I was in Spray’s dome-shaped gym helping decorate for the prom when I was asked if I could attach streamers to the ceiling. I found a 10-foot stepladder and thought “I bet I can stand on the ‘This Is Not A Step’ step.” Stretching as high as possible, I was able to staple a streamer. Moving to the next location and once again on the top non-step, the ladder buckled and I fell headfirst toward the gym floor.

I attempted to do a

push-up from 10 feet. My glasses were the only thing broken from the fall. A butterfly bandage stopped the bleeding and X-rays revealed no broken bones.

However, I did struggle driving without power steering in my pick-up.

In 1977, on my first day in Florence, “I bet I could jump over the chain-link fence on my way to the practice football field.”

Instead, I hit the fence and fell on my back in the grass beyond. I jumped up as if not hurt but I was wrong. I was given a ride to the emergency room and unceremoniously entered the halls of Siuslaw High School assisted with crutches the next day.

A few weeks later while teaching, a student, Rocky, saw my pick-up with my motorcycle in the back. He asked me to go riding on the sand dunes.

The following Saturday, I was flying through the sand when I thought “I bet I can jump that small sand mound and land in wet sand. The front wheel was instantly buried, causing me to fly over the handlebars. I hit both of my thighs and bruises formed from my knees to my hips.

The next Saturday, I took my motorcycle to

Warrenton and gave it to my brother. He was married with two children so his common sense brain was probably functioning better than mine.


In 1978, the track program stored its equipment in the gym. After baseball practice one late afternoon, “I bet I can jump onto the pole vault landing pads from the railing of the basketball bleachers.” While in mid-flight, the gym door opened and looking at me was Vice Principal Dave Rankin.

He immediately left but I was at school the following morning to meet with him and promised to never do it again. Especially since there had been a baseball player jumping with me.

That summer, a storage shed was built to hold the track equipment.

Not all “I bet I can” moments involve physical risks. As with my gym jumping event, my future as a teacher was at risk.

Next week, I will address other risks taken by competitive athletes. There are times when these “I bet” moments can have negative consequences on their future and their financial well being.



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