

TODAY

Laird Hamilton

This thrill-seeker has changed surfing forever.



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3. On a separate piece of paper, write a paragraph that explains how surfing has changed between then and now.

On a hot August day in 2000, a film crew gathered on Teahupoo Beach in Tahiti. They had come to photograph one of the most fearless and innovative surfing legends of all time, Laird Hamilton. The then 36-year-old daredevil was revered for his ability to barrel through some of the fiercest waves in the world. But even he hadn't conquered Teahupoo Reef—yet.

Teahupoo Reef is notorious for being one of the most dangerous surfing spots on the planet. The water is hazardously shallow, dropping from 2,000 feet deep to six feet in just a few hundred yards. And the roaring breakers spew from both the east and west before crashing onto the craggy shore. Even experienced surfers admit it's nearly impossible to avoid getting swallowed by the raging current. Just a month before, a young pro was killed after he was knocked off his board and brutally battered by the churning waves.

But despite the risks, Laird was determined to face the ferocious swells head-on. "Now is not

the time to be anxious," he told reporters.

Suddenly, a "tube" the size of a two-story building began to roll in. As the two had rehearsed many times before, Laird's partner towed him toward the wave on a Jet Ski. Laird let go of the tow rope just as the treacherous monster picked up speed and rose menacingly above him. And with his feet firmly planted on the board and his arms extended outward, he kept his balance. In just over 10 seconds, Laird rocketed through to the other side, conquering "the heaviest wave in the world."

Surfing has come a long way since that fateful day. Laird's "tow-in" method has made it possible for other elite surfers, like Kelly Slater, to reach waves quickly. Today's equipment is also more high tech—and better, most say. Slick body suits are engineered to **whisk** water away from the skin. Shorter, lighter boards made of sleek plastic are in constant demand. And Laird's newly invented foilboard enables surfers to cut through a wave's choppy surface.

With such state-of-the-art gear, surfers can now take their sport to a new level—braving waves that no one would have dared confront eight years ago. Just last year Laird Hamilton trounced a 70-foot wave. Kowabunga, dude! ■

Look for one of my words on this page!

