

SUP Founder Laird Hamilton To Paddle for Pink

BY KELLY LAFFEY



The health effects of being on the water have long been acknowledged, and living well at sea takes on a deeper meaning this Saturday, when the annual Paddle for Pink is held at Havens Beach in Sag Harbor. The stand up paddleboarding (SUP) race and sunset party raise money for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF). Leading the efforts that day will be Laird Hamilton, a highly lauded big-wave surfer and the father of stand up paddleboarding, and his wife Gabby Reece, a former pro volleyball player.

"I'm honored to be able to bring awareness, to help raise money, and do everything I can to kind of get us to a point where we cure this," says Hamilton. Contributions and participation have grown exponentially since founder Maria Baum, a breast cancer survivor who found solace in SUP during her treatment, first brought Paddle for Pink to the Hamptons in 2012. Last year's event raised \$1.5 million for BCRF.

"The main reason I'm at this event is because of Maria Baum and her connection with me," says Hamilton of his inspiration for participating. "She was paddling one of my boards when she went through her ordeal with breast cancer. She reached out and said, 'you don't know me, but we've had a long relationship.' And that touched me."

Hamilton, Reece, and their three daughters will be on hand the day of the event. The star-studded bash continues later on, as *Girls* star and creator Lena Dunham will be a special guest at the evening cocktail party.

Though Hamilton is unsure if he'll paddle the course as he is currently recovering from a hand injury, he's looking forward to providing encouragement. "I'll be in the 'pit group,' cheering everyone on, giving moral support, paddling stroke techniques. Any way I can help them," he says.

Participants in the 3 and 6 mile races are well advised to pick Hamilton's brain for advice, as the Hawaii native is widely credited with founding stand up paddleboarding. "I started in a real organic way. I had my first daughter, and I had some tandem boards made so I could take her surfing," he says of the sport's infancy. "Before I took her out, I wanted to get good at riding the boards...I was at the beach, and my friend had a canoe paddle, and I thought, it would be nice if you never had to lay back down [to go surfing], if you just stayed up the whole time." Hamilton took the canoe paddle and began to play around in the surf. "It was a little short, so I was paddling around and catching tiny waves and riding them. I was immediately struck by not only the perspective, but the whole feeling and the motion and the productivity of [SUP]." Hamilton made prototypes of more appropriate paddles—"In the beginning I probably broke a few of them," he says—and then began to shape the sport.

Hamilton paddled for about five or six years by himself before the sport really took off. "Initially people, not that they discredited it, but they were like, that's just Laird, doing

something crazy again," says Hamilton, who enjoys SUP as its own sport, and also as a training tool for his big-wave surfing endeavors. "Stand up is an incredible training tool," Hamilton continues. "It's also a very good vehicle for transport. For fitness, it is an incredible workout. It makes you a better surfer, makes you stronger."

Despite its runaway popularity, the sport still has a few naysayers, groups of people who think that surfing



Hamilton with a stand up paddleboard

should only exist in its original state. But for every person who discredits it, Hamilton knows there is someone who is drawn to it. "I take the heat for everyone who loves it," he says. "It's for the people that enjoy it." 🐬

Hamptons Paddle for Pink will be held August 1 at Havens Beach in Sag Harbor. A Sunset Party will follow at 6:30 p.m. in Bridgehampton. For more info and to make a donation visit hamptonspaddleforpink.org.

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