

## SHORT STORIES

# MIRACLE IN THE ATLANTIC

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There were high hopes for this year's inaugural Paskowitz Cup. Featuring teams from Turkey, Yemen, Cyprus, Israel, it was set to be the most prestigious surfing competition in the Middle East.

There was, however, controversy from the start, when Hamas' Minister for Surfing, Jalaal El-Ghazzawy, insisted that the competition be held at Sheikh Khazdein. 'Gaza's beaches are second to none,' he said, 'so why shouldn't the Cup be held here?' The claim was immediately rejected by the Israelis, who tweeted a statement saying, 'Gaza's beaches suck, Tel Aviv's beaches rule, and everyone knows it.' El-Ghazzawy immediately tweeted back that Hamas didn't recognise the existence of Tel Aviv's beaches or, for that matter, of Tel Aviv.

Following an emergency meeting of the WSL, it was finally agreed that the event would take place at El Bloque Del Sol, the tiniest of the Canary Islands. Although not known for its beaches, El Bloque Del Sol boasts a thriving sunscreen industry and once led the world in malaria.

The island lived up to its reputation for fairly crap waves, but this didn't stop Israel and the Palestinians from blowing the other teams out of the water. Veteran boardrider Eitan Ahroni and team-mate Moshe 'Red Sea Ripper' Friedman both displayed some classic aerial manoeuvres, pounding the Turks, the Cypriots, and the Yemenites into the foamy depths.

The Palestinian team – competition underdogs – took everyone by surprise, carving the hell out of the waves on their distinctive red, white, black and green thrusters, courtesy of fledgling brand 77 Gaza Strip. Newcomer Mahmoud Khalid and renowned goofy-footer Bashaar 'Prince of Al Deira' Saqqaf pulled off some particularly radical moves. The judging panel, comprising ex-champions from the US, Australia, Brazil, South Africa, and France, agreed that the Palestinians were clearly going to give the larger and better equipped Israeli team a run for their money in the final.

But the so-called 'David and Goliath' showdown was delayed by a surprise – although not entirely unexpected – protest

by Israeli coach Yossi Skolnikov, who insisted that Palestine be disqualified as, since 'Palestine' did not officially exist, it could not participate in this or any other surfing competition. Skolnikov refused to be drawn on why he had not raised the objection earlier, merely stating that 'On this matter we are non-negotiable.'

After prolonged talks between Skolnikov, Palestinian coach Jalaal Al-Zahar, and contest officials, Palestine agreed to be re-named 'The Disputed Territories' for the purposes of the competition.

However, the action had barely resumed when Al-Zahar claimed interference on the part of Friedman, asserting that he'd dropped in on Khalid and had 'illegally taken possession of Khalid's wave.' Skolnikov denied this, maintaining that Khalid had mistakenly relinquished his priority to Friedman. When questioned about the alleged incident, Khalid responded, 'Bro, I have no idea what Al-Zahar or Skolnikov are on about. I was too in the zone to notice anything, bro.' Friedman commented, 'Same here.' He later added, 'Bro.'

But the Friedman-Khalid Affair, as it came to be known, remained a sticking point, and there followed lengthy discussions of who actually 'owned' the disputed wave, the Palestinian contingent refusing to back down from their contention that Khalid had prior claim, Israel all the while maintaining that Friedman was in the right.

The US and South African judges sided with Skolnikov, while Australia and France backed Al-Zahar. The Brazilian judge, anxious to maintain good diplomatic relations with both sides, described Friedman's technique as 'somewhat overzealous' but concluded that the question of who dropped in on whom was 'too close to call.'

The dispute escalated when a large group of backpackers from Cornwall staged a beach-side protest against the Israelis, insisting that Khalid had priority, although they later conceded that they had not seen the wave in question and in fact were on a completely different island at the time.

The Friedman-Khalid Affair was played out in the international press, with surfing correspondents from both The Guardian and Le Monde stridently denouncing the Israeli team's excessive use of force and 'generally uncool attitude'.

Skolnikov, Al-Zahar, judges, officials, and random spectators then re-convened at the El Bloque Del Sol Hilton for a round of intensive talks. But after several days and no progress, it was decided that the competition be postponed to a later date, pending consultations with UN Surfing Council representatives Tom Carroll and Laird Hamilton.

The Israel and Palestinian surfers, meanwhile, had remained on the shore the whole time, huddled in their separate camps on either side of a large sand dune, waiting for something to happen. Excluded from the high-level discussions, they appeared to have been all but forgotten. Both teams, tired of sitting around, were about to leave the beach, when the wind suddenly shifted direction, creating a powerful offshore swell and the biggest, cleanest, glassiest waves El Bloque de Sol had ever witnessed.

Khalid climbed to the top of the dune and peered over at the opposition. 'Bro,' he said to Friedman, 'I still don't know which of us got to his feet first back there, but who the fuck cares, bro? Those are the crankingest waves I've seen this side of Fuerteventura. Bro, why don't we just get out there and ride those suckers?'

Friedman looked out to sea once more. 'Yo, bro, I was thinking the same thing. Those waves are off the wailing wall!' He picked up his board. 'To hell with the Paskowitz Cup! This is some miraculous shit right here. Bro!'

And indeed it was as if the Almighty had reached down and swept a divine hand across the ocean's surface. The waves rose and curled, scrolling shoreward, one set after another, strangely silent in their perfection, like some sort of heavenly screen-saver. The Paskowitz Cup might well have gone belly-up, but both the Israelis and the Palestinians paddled out together and ripped up those waves like there was no tomorrow – which in the Middle East is a pretty likely prospect. Bro. 