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IML NewsFlash

Holly Beck

Talk about girl power: California native Holly Beck has got it going on! Holly is one of the highest ranked women in surfing, and was once voted "Best Female Extreme Athlete" at the Teen Choice Awards. Holly's accomplishments have helped attract other women to the once male-dominated sport and landed her a TV role on the WB series *Boarding House*. Holly took a break from catching the waves to talk to us about this radical sport and the women behind it.



IML: We hear that you almost never got started in surfing because your mom disapproved of it as a sport for girls. How did you finally change her mind?

Holly: My mom is very old-fashioned. She was captain of the cheerleading squad and homecoming queen, and she had this idea that girls only belonged in the beach in bikinis looking cute, not out competing with the boys. She always used to tell me, "You won't get any boys that way!" Of course, she's come around since then, but at the time it was very frustrating because I was a little tomboy. My mom had visions of her little girls doing ballet and cheerleading, and I just wasn't that. So I had to convince her that surfing was okay for girls.

IML: What's her attitude towards surfing now?

Holly: Now she loves it! And all my sisters surf. They all know how to paddle out and catch whitewash. The youngest two are starting to surpass that and I think they'll really be surfers. Mom's really proud and stoked.

IML: What was it like when you first started surfing? Was it still a mostly male sport?

Holly: When I first started, I didn't know any other girls who surfed other than my best friend Lisa, who had borrowed a board from a neighbor. She was my partner in crime. My mom had ground it into my head that surfing was for boys, and as much as I disagreed with her, it had still affected me in some way. I knew I wanted to do it, but I felt like I shouldn't be doing it. We'd go down to the beach at 4:30 a.m. so no one would see us surfing. When it got light and other surfers came out, we'd put our boards down on the beach and just swim because we were embarrassed. That was going into my sophomore year of high school.

IML: What turned the tide for you, so to speak?

Holly: When school started that year, I had a wetsuit and I was bragging because I thought I was really cool. One of the guys overheard me and

recruited me for the surf team because they needed girls. It didn't matter if you couldn't surf at all; girls earned points for the team. It was really because of them that I got better.

IML: What are some of the common stereotypes about women surfers? What do you want people to know about women who surf?

Holly: When it first started as a sport, the girls were thought of as really gnarly. Most of them looked like guys and were really aggressive or they couldn't really surf at all. That has definitely changed with movies like *Blue Crush* and TV shows like *Boarding House* and *Surf Girls*. Now all the attention on women's surfing is helping to change the stereotypes. Girls can be cute, athletic, AND good at surfing at the same time.



IML: Have you ever felt like you weren't taken seriously because of the way you look?

Holly: Oh, definitely! It's been a challenge. I think because I have that California surfer girl look, I was a lot more successful than I should have been when I first started. My first sponsor came out of a modeling deal; they hired me to model and *then* they realized I could surf too. It took a decent amount of time for my skills to progress, and even once they progressed, people thought of me as a model who couldn't really surf.

IML: What would you say to kids who are interested in trying a new sport but are afraid to take the plunge?

Holly: My dad has always taught me to work hard and if you want something, you can achieve it if you work at it. That was something I've always looked at.

IML: You have four younger sisters. They must look up to you! Was it ever crazy with that many sisters in the house?

Holly: It always was and still is! A few of us have flown the coop, but that doesn't make it any less crazy.

IML: When you and your sisters had fights, how did you resolve them?

Holly: Whoever was the loudest won! My dad is a litigation lawyer, so he has always been good at arguing and teaching us arguing skills. Most of us are pretty analytical and follow the logical process, which helps. When we were younger, he would say, "Why?" We couldn't just say, "I want this or that!" like most kids do. If we wanted something, we had to present him with an argument about why we wanted it. That really helped the arguing process because it wasn't just a repetitive yell. It didn't always mean he would say yes, but it got us thinking that these are the steps you have to take. It applies to other parts of life as well.

IML: What would you say to young people who might be tempted to smoke or experiment with drugs?

Holly: It's only going to be a barrier to what you want. It will just slow you down. Trying those things may be part of the growing-up process for some people and you may come in contact with it, but I think it's important to remember that the further you stray from your path and your goals, the longer it will take you to get there.

IML: How do you cheer yourself up when you feel down?

Holly: I try and think of where I want to go and what I've accomplished so far. As a professional surfer, there are a lot of times when you feel down or angry. You lose a lot more than you win, so every time you lose, it's a challenge to not be so hard on yourself. I try to focus on the good things and the heats and contests I have won. It's all about moving on to the next one and what you can do better to get there.



IML: It sounds like you've really stuck to your dreams. Why do you think that's so important?

Holly: Everyone growing up has things they want to do and be. There is no reason you can't get there. I hate hearing about people who settle for something lower than they wanted, when a lot of times just taking that one extra step would get you there. Satisfied people are a lot happier.

IML: Can't argue with that! Holly, thanks for talking to us, and good luck in future competitions.

Holly: Thanks!

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